



GARDENS
ILLUSTRATED

A Year in the Edible Garden

A month-by-month guide to delicious things to grow and eat



SPECIAL EDITION



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Editor's letter



A Year in the Edible Garden is a new, special edition from *Gardens Illustrated* for gardener-cooks. From herb expert Jekka McVicar's essential culinary herbs to grow and eat, to the most flavourful vegetables from the Great Dixter kitchen garden and the best British apple cultivars, the team at *Gardens Illustrated* has cherry picked the best ideas about what to grow to eat.

Jojo Tulloh's seasonal picking and eating ideas provide month-by-month inspiration, and also included are a practical year-round sowing and growing guide, and suggestions for the best new kitchen garden kit.

Whether you are a novice or experienced gardener-cook, or simply someone who would like to grow a little more of what you eat, I hope you will find *A Year in the Edible Garden* an invaluable addition to your outdoor toolkit.

Lucy Bellamy

LUCY BELLAMY, EDITOR

Contents

Spring

- 8 **Spring notes** As the growing season gets under way, get busy sowing windowsill chillies, planting out potatoes, and sowing salads and fast-growing radishes outdoors inspired by allotmenteer Jojo Tulloh
- 14 **Herbs for cooks** Jekka McVicar's inventory of must-have herbs
- 18 **Best of both worlds** Peter Bauwens shows how to get the most out of growing vegetables by also using their flowers in floral displays
- 24 **Tips for sowing seeds** Learn techniques for successful germination

Summer

- 28 **Summer notes** Enjoy the bounty of the ripening kitchen garden, with an eye on watering, weeding and successional sowing
- 34 **Steeped in the soil** Worton Organic Garden is the ultimate market garden, with seven acres of produce supplying its farm shop and café
- 40 **Tried and tasted** Everything in the Real Seed collection has been trialled for taste and ease of growing, including many unusual varieties
- 44 **Planting out** Essential kit for tending to your edible garden
- 48 **Potager perfection** Sustainability is the order of the day at the magnificent walled kitchen garden of Kasteel Hex in Belgium
- 54 **Great Dixter delicacies** Expert advice and favourite cultivars from the renowned kitchen garden in East Sussex
- 58 **Eating out** Stylish furniture and accessories for eating outdoors

Autumn

- 62 **Autumn notes** There's no let-up in the garden as Jojo harvests late crops, unearths jam recipes, digs out compost and tidies her plot
- 68 **Apples for life** Alongside the contemporary renovation of the 19th-century garden at Gravetye Manor, head gardener Tom Coward has preserved a wild corner for growing and harvesting apples
- 74 **Joys of the black stuff** On their farm near Pontefract, Robert and Heather Copley have revitalised the art of growing liquorice

Winter

- 80 **Winter notes** As well as taking stock of the year and planning for the next season, it's time to prune fruit trees and plant overwintering garlic
- 86 **A wholesome harvest** A pioneer of organic and no-dig growing, Charles Dowding advises how to plan your winter veg garden
- 90 **Flavour of the month** Jojo Tulloh describes her methods for growing that most flavoursome of crops – garlic
- 94 **Branching out** Chris and Sarah Pike of Branch Nurseries have made an art of training fruit trees, with a focus on old British cultivars

Useful resources

- 100 **Book choice** Our pick of some of the most informative edible gardening titles, from biodynamic growing to the jam-maker's garden
- 104 **Seasonal growing guide** Our handy, visual aid showing when to sow seeds, plant out seedlings and harvest crops
- 106 **Seed suppliers** Our selection of the best edible seed suppliers
- 108 **Subscription offer** Subscribe to the digital edition of *Gardens Illustrated*
- 111 **Reader holiday** Join the *Gardens Illustrated* tour of some of the most inspirational kitchen gardens in the South West in September 2020



JASON INGRAM

CONTRIBUTORS

James Alexander-Sinclair is one of the UK's foremost garden designers

Louise Allen runs Garden and Wood with her partner Piers Newth

Peter Bauwens is a nurseryman who co-owns De Nieuwe Tuin nursery in Belgium

Caroline Beck is a cut flower grower in County Durham

Tom Coward is head gardener at Gravetye Manor in East Sussex

Charles Dowding is an organic grower and the guru of no-dig gardening

Jason Ingram is a photographer and winner of the Garden Media Guild Photographer of the Year 2019

Jodie Jones is a former deputy editor of *Gardens Illustrated*

Lia Leendertz is the author of the seasonal guides: *Almanac*

Jekka McVicar has been growing herbs for more than 30 years and runs a herb farm near Bristol

Andrew Montgomery is an award-winning photographer and regular contributor to *Gardens Illustrated*

Tom Petherick is the author of several books on vegetable growing

Jojo Tulloh is a food writer and allotmenteer who lives in east London. She writes about food and gardens for several magazines, and is a former columnist for *Gardens Illustrated*

Sarah Young is a printmaker, illustrator and maker

MAGAZINE CONTACTS

EDITORIAL	
Editor	Lucy Bellamy
Deputy editor	Sorrel Everton
Art director	David Grenham
Deputy art editor	Niki Goss
Production editor	Juliet Giles
Digital editor	Daisy Bowie-Sell
Editorial assistant	Katie Dutton
Botanical adviser	Dr James Compton
Designer	Jenny Price
Sub editor	Hilary Brown

ADVERTISING	
Group advertising manager	Laura Jones 0117 300 8509 laura.jones@immediate.co.uk
Advertising manager	Heather Golden 0117 300 8805 heather.golden@immediate.co.uk
Business development manager	Sophie North 0117 300 8804 sophie.north@immediate.co.uk
Brand sales executive	Baylee Sowter-Halling 0117 300 8549 baylee.sowter@immediate.co.uk
Brand sales executive	Phil Wallington 0117 300 8807 phil.wallington@immediate.co.uk
Brand sales executive	Aileen Booth 0117 300 8808 aileen.booth@immediate.co.uk
Classified sales executive	Lara Covill 0117 300 8222 lara.covill@immediate.co.uk
Advertising designer	Parvin Sepehr

INSERTS	
Laurence Robertson	+353 (0)876 902208
CIRCULATION, MARKETING, PRESS & PR	
Newtrade manager	Rob Brock
Subscriptions director	Jacky Perales-Morris
Direct marketing manager	Aimee Rhymmer
Press officer	Dom Lobley dominic.lobley@immediate.co.uk

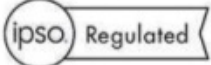
MANAGEMENT	
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Managing director, specialist	Marie Davies
Promotions and partnerships manager, specialist	Rosa Sherwood
Publishing assistant	Lara Von Weber

SYNDICATION & LICENSING	
Director of licensing & syndication	Tim Hudson

PRODUCTION	
Production director	Sarah Powell
Production managers	Rose Griffiths, Louisa Molter
Junior production co-ordinator	Georgia Tolley

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Spring

Now is the time to get going with your edible crops. Plant up chitted potatoes, sow early salads and get on top of indoor sowings. Keep an eye out for late frosts when it comes to planting out

SPRING NOTES

Throughout the year, food writer and allotmenteer Jojo Tulloh marks the seasons with suggestions of what to grow and what to harvest each month, with recipe ideas to make the most of home-grown ingredients

WORDS JOJO TULLOH ILLUSTRATIONS SARAH YOUNG

March

In the garden

Some years ago a friend brought me several packets of vegetable seeds back from India. There were *pusa navbahar* (cluster beans), two types of *brinjal* (aubergine), *dudhi* (bottle gourds), *palak* (spinach), *pusa sawani* (okra), chilli and white radish – enough for an entire allotment's worth of Indian vegetables. The seeds were beautifully packaged; the plant names spelled out in black, in old-fashioned typefaces and illustrated with drawings of vegetables. Too beautiful to use, they sit in the letter rack on my desk, now long out of date. Though no seeds germinated, the idea of an Indian allotment stayed with me.

This year I plan to do it. First came the thought of a windowsill packed with bright-red, orange, yellow and purple chilli peppers. Then came the accidental discovery of fresh turmeric in my local market. If you've only ever used dried turmeric, the fresh root is a revelation. This small, buff-coloured rhizome looks like a large grub; peel away the thin skin and a deep-orange colour is revealed. Grate the fibrous root and pour over a little boiling water and you have a bowl full of very fragrant, deep-orange liquid with an oily sheen. The taste is earthy with a citrus tang. You can use it in Indian cooking in place of dried turmeric or drink it as a tea (but not if you are pregnant or have diabetes). Think of how much stronger and fresher tasting fresh ginger is than dried and you'll get an idea of how to use it. But watch out, it stains fingers and surfaces yellow; it dyed my pumpkin soup a rich, egg-yolk orange and makes a very finely coloured kedgeree (smoked haddock, egg, spices and rice).

Flavour aside, the rhizome is believed to have powerful health benefits with anti-bacterial, anti-fungal and anti-inflammatory properties. In India, turmeric has long been used in Ayurvedic medicine and now a growing body of research in the West supports its efficacy. Turmeric is not hard to grow and if you do so you can



also use the leaves to flavour curries and stews. Take a fresh rhizome and pop it under 5cm of potting compost and you should see growth fairly quickly. Keep moist and feed every two weeks.

Meera Sodha's book *Made in India* (Fig Tree, 2014) is a masterclass in Indian home cooking. I asked Meera for her favourite Indian vegetables and she suggested cassava, mooli (long white radish), bottle gourds and okra. Both of the latter will grow well under cover although cassava might prove tricky. A few days later I received a shiny brown seed in the post. It was a tea seed Meera had brought back with her from a plantation in the Kodagu district of southern India. I plan to grow it on the allotment and pick the aromatic leaves tender and young for a fresh infusion (or perhaps an infused flavouring for a simple milk ice).

In the kitchen

There is something peculiarly satisfying about pulling and then eating weeds. It's the ultimate in synchronicity for the gardener cook. Not only do wild greens provide an iron-rich ingredient at a time when few greens are available but harvesting the first nettles and dandelions means you have your eyes to the ground. Knowing when the earth has begun to warm up again is vitally important for successful planting. I am a fairly conservative forager, sticking to common plants I can be sure of identifying. Nettles and dandelions are two of my favourites. I like to blanch my dandelions (excluding the light to make the leaves less green and bitter) by letting them grow under a flowerpot for a week; then I eat them boiled and dressed with lemon juice and olive oil. Take 450g of dandelion greens and plunge them into a big pot of salted water for about five minutes, drain and spread them on to a tea towel to dry, then squeeze them gently to get rid of some, but not all, of the water (leaving a little helps dilute the lemon juice). In a bowl, dress the



If you've only ever used dried turmeric, the fresh root is a revelation. The small, buff-coloured rhizome looks like a grub; beneath the skin it's a deep-orange colour. It's easy to grow and you can also use the leaves to flavour curries

greens with the juice of one lemon and about two tablespoons of olive oil. If you fancy a change, try sautéing blanched dandelions with olive oil, chilli pepper and garlic.

With nettles, I pick (with gloves on) only the very tender tops, blanch them in salted water, then press them dry between two tea towels. I use nettles as a spinach substitute with feta and pine nuts on a tomato-less pizza, in *börek* (filo triangles) or added to lemon risotto with some crème fraîche and parmesan.

If you have overwintered mustard leaves on your plot, pick a bunch of bitter leaves and cook them with green lentils for a restorative lunch. Take one bunch of leaves – around 500g for four people – remove the stems, then wash them and wilt them in the water that still clings to their leaves, drain and chop coarsely. Meanwhile peel and finely chop an onion, a celery stalk, a small fennel bulb and a carrot. Then heat four tablespoons of olive oil and in this fry the vegetables with two garlic cloves, peeled and smashed. Cover the pan and sweat over a medium heat until the vegetables are soft, then stir in one heaped teaspoonful each of finely chopped fresh oregano and rosemary. Add 450g of small green lentils and a litre of water, bring to the boil and simmer until the lentils are soft, then season. Briefly sauté the wilted greens in olive oil and add to the lentils. Add the juice of half a lemon and offer lemon wedges on the side. Serve with sourdough toast, rubbed with olive oil and garlic.

What to sow

- Pot gardeners should consider lighting up their front step or balcony with a firework display of chilli peppers. Try the bushy 'Sparkler', which is covered in elongated, pointed vivid red peppers – from Sea Spring Seeds (seaspringseeds.co.uk) – or the equally attractive 'Spike' with long, thin, red fruits. Real Seeds (see page 106) has the remarkable 'Pyramid' chilli with a stubby triangular shape. It starts out purple and ripens into an array of pinks, oranges and reds. Chillies need heat to get started so start in an airing cupboard if you don't have a heated propagator.
- After a few successive summers of green tomatoes I am switching to two cultivars (from Real Seeds) that ripen early: 'Latah' and 'Stupice'. Both have a high tolerance for short summers and are perfect for greenhouse-less gardeners. Out on the plot it's time to plant chitted potatoes in trenches, lined with well-rotted compost or comfrey, and sow a line or two of radishes, rocket, onions, mustard greens and corn salad.

What to cook

Dal with sorrel

Split mung beans cook quickly and evenly to a smooth purée to which you can add herbs and green vegetables. This dish has a lemony flavour but you can vary it by adding chard, amsoi greens (see below), spinach or nettles: **200g mung beans, 750ml water, ¼tsp turmeric, ½-1tsp salt to taste, pinch of asafoetida, ½tsp whole cumin seeds, 2 whole dried red chillies, 1 shallot, peeled and finely chopped, small bunch of sorrel, de-stemmed.** Put the mung beans in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to the boil and skim froth. Add the turmeric and cook for 45 minutes. Add the salt and stir in the chopped sorrel. Cook until tender. Heat the oil in a pan, and when hot add the spices in the order above. After a few seconds add the shallot and cook until it colours, pour into the cooked dal and serve.

Amsoi greens fried in spiced oil

Chiltern Seeds (see page 106) sells seeds of peppery amsoi green or Indian mustard greens; add it to dals or use it to make this dish of wilted greens. **500g amsoi greens, 1tbsp mustard oil, ½tsp whole black mustard seeds, 1 dried chilli, 1 clove garlic, peeled and smashed, salt to season.** De-stem the greens and rinse well. Heat the mustard oil and when it's hot add the black mustard seeds. Once the seeds start popping add the dried chilli and fry until it darkens. Add the garlic to the oil and, almost instantly afterwards, add the leaves. Using tongs, turn the leaves quickly in the pan until they wilt and cook until the water evaporates, then season with salt. Serve the fried greens with shop-bought samosas for a quick and easy Indian lunch.

April

In the garden

April is a terrible month for impatient gardeners. I know, I am one. With windowsills bristling with potted-up seedlings, the temptation to plant them out can be overpowering (and disastrous). It's very easy to let a few days of warm weather go to your head but planting out your tender courgettes, peppers, pumpkins and tomatoes before the last frost is a recipe for tears before breakfast.

If you really want to get your hands dirty, why not plant radishes? The clever kitchen gardener will already have a row in the ground but for the rest of us now is the time to sow. With their flash of green, red and white, radishes are the beauty queens of the vegetable kingdom. Not only that but they are among the fastest growing of all vegetables, offering (almost) instant gratification. A plate of crisp, mildly peppery radishes makes the perfect spring dish (see column right). If sown successionaly, all parts of the radish – leaf, root and seedpod – can be enjoyed in a salad at the same time. *Raphanus sativus* 'French Breakfast' is one of my favourites, a classic oval-shaped radish, magenta on top with a crisp, white tip and a mild, nutty flavour. Other favourites include 'Cherry Belle', a bright, cherry-red globe cultivar, 'Pink Beauty', a sweet, round radish with pink flesh, and 'Sparkler', a classic red and white radish that stays crisp for longer in the ground. Chiltern Seeds has all of these, as well as a mixed packet of red, yellow, white and violet radishes from Italy. For those with a penchant for the unusual, try 'Rat's Tail', which is grown not for its roots but for its edible pods – these elongated, pencil-thick pods sometimes corkscrew and are good raw in salads, tossed into a stir fry or pickled. Before the pods form, the single-petal, pink-tinged flowers will lure beneficial pollinators, such as hoverflies, to your plot.

Radishes should be sown in drills 1cm deep at a spacing of 2-4cm. They need to be kept well watered and should germinate quickly after two to three days. Thin any clustered seedlings to



2-4cm if necessary. Sow side by side with slow-germinating parsnips, which are often forgotten and accidentally dug up. A row of radishes makes for a good reminder. Because they are fast growing, radishes can be inter cropped with overwintered garlic or onions, or sown around fruit bushes, such as gooseberries or currants. Joy Larkcom suggests pressing a jam jar lid down into the soil and sowing seeds into the indented circle to make dots of radishes among rows of sweet corn.

For another 'instant' spring crop, sow a row of mixed salads. Try a mix of reds and greens, such as the Italian Misticanza mix (radicchio, endive, orach, mizuna, kale, mustard and corn salad) or the Provençal Mesclun mix (loose-leaved salads, such as chicory, rocket and watercress). Both can be sown now and will fill up bare earth with colour and texture and bring benefits to your salad bowl.

In the kitchen

Growing your own fruit and vegetables provides you with ingredients that are otherwise hard to source. This is at its most apparent in spring when the tips, leaves and shoots of plants that will crop later on can be used as salad ingredients or to flavour soups and tarts. Many of these ingredients (peas, broad beans, asparagus and herbs) are at their very best when eaten as soon as possible after they are picked. One of my favourite spring flavours is green garlic. I sow my garlic fairly close together so I can lift some of it early and still have a decent crop later on. At this stage the whole bulb and leaf can be used. I peel, chop and sauté the bulbs and leaves (usually six, when they look like spring onions, or four, when they resemble slim leeks, are enough to serve four people) and add them to very simple, clean-tasting soups with potato, or to a quiche with leeks and nettles, or fold them through focaccia dough. Dolmades rolled using tender, spring vine leaves can be made with rice, green garlic, raisins



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and pine nuts. A little later on I use green garlic with the first, very small, artichokes in a sloppy soup of peas with a poached egg on top.

Pea tendrils, onion tops and the leafy tips of broad beans can be eaten in a salad of tiny new potatoes and brown shrimps, or stirred into a green risotto at the last moment. Blackcurrant leaves can be used to infuse custards for ice cream.

Asparagus should be coming into season at the end of this month. This is the first year I will be cropping asparagus from my plot. The first few spears will be eaten simply with lemon and butter but later on (I'm hoping for a bumper crop) I will be forced to try a little harder. As the spears get a bigger I will be grilling them and using them in a variety of ways. First you need to bend the stems; they should snap low down where they become woody (reserve the bottoms to flavour a stock for soups). Blanch them in salted boiling water for one minute, then spread out to cool on a tea towel. The spears are rubbed with olive oil and grilled over charcoal (or on a griddle) for about six minutes, turning frequently. They are very good served simply with a dressing of sea salt, lemon and olive oil, and a few shavings of parmesan, or with sieved hard-boiled eggs, capers and radishes. Or try a vinaigrette made with freshly squeezed orange juice, vinegar and olive oil. If the weather's good enough, I'll be lighting a fire in the back garden and cooking a paella with razor clams and spears of asparagus, fanned out like the spokes of a wheel. Or I may make a soufflé with the stalks puréed and blended, and the tips added whole to the batter.

What to sow

• My intention is always for beauty and fruitfulness to go hand in hand. The start of the growing season is so exciting. What to put next to each other? In the past I've sown a 'flag of salad', with triangular wedges of different varieties radiating out from the centre. Another year, a patchwork of squares, sown individually with sorrel, chard, beetroot and carrots, and mixed with annual flowers, looked pretty, as did tall, red orach, alongside striped borlotti beans intertwined with the climbing *Ipomoea lobata*. Last year, our local primary school's garden had hazel wigwams twined with blue morning glory and the bean 'A Cosse Violette'. On my plot I mixed the black-green leaves of cavolo nero with the lime-washed petals of sunflower 'Vanilla Ice' and neon-green zinnias. *Dahlia* 'Collarette Dandy' looked good underplanted with courgettes. This year, the feathery fronds of my asparagus bed might work well with a row of lavender, and my rainbow chard will look good behind my step-over apples.

What to cook

Spring on a plate

Take a bunch of radishes and wash them, leaving the stalks on. Put them on a plate with a small pile of sea salt and a pat of unsalted butter. Smear a little butter on to each radish, by pushing it into the butter pat, sprinkle with sea salt and eat. Another delicious idea is to serve new vegetables as crudités with a **hot anchovy cream**. For this you need: **2 large cloves of garlic, peeled and minced, 150ml olive oil, 150ml double cream, 2 x 50g tins anchovies**. Simmer the garlic and olive oil in a pan over a very low heat until the garlic is soft. Add the anchovies and cook over the same low heat until they have melted into the olive oil. Add the cream and cook slowly on same heat until you have a velvety, salty emulsion (up to 30 mins). Serve in a warmed bowl with vegetables around it.

Asparagus risotto

450g asparagus, 350g arborio rice, 1 onion, finely chopped, 125ml white wine, 1 litre or so stock (vegetable or chicken), 2tbsp olive oil, 25g butter, salt and pepper, parmesan. Serves 4.

Remove the asparagus tips and cook briefly in your stock. After a minute or so take them out, refresh in cold water and put to one side. Next, finely chop the asparagus stalks and cook for 1 minute in the same stock before removing. Sauté the onion in the olive oil and butter. When soft, add the chopped stalks, stir well and add the rice; stir to coat each grain, add the wine and stir until it is absorbed. Add the stock, a ladleful at a time, and wait for it to be absorbed before adding any more. Stir regularly until the rice is cooked but still has a little bite. Add the asparagus tips, season and serve with parmesan curls.

May

In the garden

May is the month in which I long for a gardening third eye. In this heightened state, I would become a paragon of focused efficiency. I would remember to earth up my potatoes and stay on top of weeds by running a hoe down the rows regularly, and I wouldn't forget to thin newly germinated salad – and I'd also take time to sow spinach, beetroot, carrot, radishes and turnips successionally at regular two-week intervals. As the polemicist William Cobbett observed 200 years ago: 'Almost every gardener could grow more by sowing less and doing this more often.'

While coolly measuring out my short rows, I would then take the time to prune my damson and my greengage trees while it's warm (this helps to prevent silver leaf disease), keep my extra eye out for slugs, snails and aphid infestation, and continue to tend to my seedlings and fragile potted-on plants on the windowsills at home. (It's so easy to miss a slug on the bottom of a seed tray and find new growth eaten down to slime-topped stalks, or forget to bring in a batch of seedlings that are being hardened off outside.) I would pot on tomatoes and peppers before they became pot bound and give newly planted fruit trees a thorough drenching once a week.

Perhaps the best way to approach this most hectic of gardening months is to remind yourself that gardening is supposed to be relaxing. Take a deep breath, go Zen and, above all, pace yourself – the growing season is a long-distance event, not a sprint.

Having had decent but not marvellous pumpkin crops in the past, this year I am going to try something different. Last year, my first sowing was decimated by snails and slugs, and those plants that survived only went on to make one or two small fruits. To provide plenty of food for this greedy crop, I've already dug several bucket-sized holes and half-filled them with well-rotted muck and filled the top in with soil. When I feel confident that the threat of



late frosts has passed (this will vary around the country), I'll bring my hardened-off plants to the plot.

Once there I'll plant them on top of the muck with a frame of bamboo or strong wire hoops over the top. Then I'll take a clear polythene carrier bag and fit this over the frame, securing the bottom with an elastic band to make a smash-proof mini cloche that will provide heat as well as protection from slugs. As an experiment I'm trying this method with two plants and two seeds sown direct, planted edgewise and 5cm deep, all roughly 1.5m apart. Watch carefully; then, when a male flower has formed on each shoot, cut it short after a female flower (with a round mini pumpkin attached) has formed behind it. This way more fruits will form behind. 'Crown Prince', 'Uchiki Kuri' and the closely related 'Hokkaido' are three flavoursome cultivars.

In the kitchen

Cooking with flowers is an obvious choice in May when gardens and countryside alike are magnificently in bloom. Scattering a handful of red and orange nasturtium flowers or bright, star-shaped borage flowers over your salad adds peppery spice, cucumber notes and plenty of colour to your salad bowl, but this year why not be a bit more ambitious? Try growing hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*) – not only are the dense spikes covered in tiny, intense blue flowers beloved of bees, but when combined with a salad of mixed leaves and chopped boiled eggs the blooms make a memorable lunch. The flavour is quite strong so go easy.

The petals of pot marigold (*Calendula officinalis*), also known as 'poor man's saffron', were once used to colour butter and cheese yellow. You can add the petals to salads, as well as rice, egg and seafood dishes where their subtle spicy flavour can be appreciated without being overwhelmed. You could also dry the flowers for use later on.



Cooking with flowers is an obvious choice in May. Scatter a handful of red and orange nasturtium flowers or bright, star-shaped borage flowers over your salad for peppery spice, cucumber notes and plenty of colour

For a new take on an old favourite, try a lemon and marigold drizzle cake. Add three tablespoons of marigold petals to the sponge mixture (three eggs, 150g butter, 175g caster sugar, zest of one lemon, 200g self-raising flour, one teaspoon baking powder, 75ml milk) and bake in a lined loaf tin. Finish with a crunchy lemon and flower crystal topping. After baking the cake make eight small holes in the top, add a handful of petals to a mixture of two tablespoons each of caster and icing sugar and the juice of one lemon, then drizzle over the cake before popping back in the oven for five minutes until crystals form.

Early in the season small green gooseberries are at their best for pies, jams and jellies. If you are feeling ambitious, you could try making a pie with a raised hot water or pork pie crust (but sweetened rather than seasoned). This old Nottinghamshire speciality was traditionally filled with green gooseberries (and plenty of sugar) instead of meat. After baking, melted apple jelly was poured in through a slit in the lid and the pie served cold with a firm set jelly. Jane Grigson has an extensive recipe in her book *Good Things*. A less labour-intensive approach (suited to riper, sweeter gooseberries) is to take 200g of sweet pastry and line a 20cm tart tin. Bake it blind with pastry beans, then arrange 300g of topped and tailed gooseberries (using scissors for this job is easiest) in the shell and pour over a custard made from two egg yolks, 50g caster sugar and 250ml single cream whisked together. Bake at 180°C for 30 minutes. Serve at room temperature with whipped cream sweetened with a tablespoon of icing sugar. □

What to sow

- Salad is an easy, rewarding crop to grow. As well as there being an immense variety of cultivars, the advantages of eating soon after picking, in terms of flavour and nutrition, makes this the best of all summer vegetables. 'Little Gem' is a perennial favourite, but this year I am growing Cos lettuce 'Little Leprechaun' for its crisp, red leaves from the Seed Co-operative (see page 106) and 'Marvel of Four Seasons', plus the Cos Romaine lettuce 'Forellenschluss', an Austrian heirloom cultivar splashed with red freckles, and the fast-growing Italian oak leaf lettuce 'Catalogna' from Chiltern Seeds. For a good selection try a mixture such as Easy Salad Bag Mix from Franchi Seeds (see page 106).
- If you are plagued by slugs, try growing the kind of peppery leaves they find less palatable, such as rocket, mizuna, mibuna, komatsuna (mustard spinach) and mustard 'Red Giant' and 'Wasabi Type' (best eaten young when it has a horseradish flavour), all from Chiltern Seeds.

What to cook

Salad dressings

We all have our own trusted vinaigrette recipe, but why not consider adding a small minced shallot to your vinegar half an hour before you make it up into a dressing, or a teaspoon of fresh, finely chopped tarragon with a lemon dressing? Try this **garlic and lemon dressing** with crisp, 'Little Gem' lettuce leaves and **sourdough croutons** (these are a great way of using up your crusts). Cube **stale sourdough bread**, put in a bowl and dribble over some **olive oil, salt and pepper**, mix with your hands until the bread is well coated and spread out on a baking tray. Crisp up slowly in a medium oven (about 150°C) the spread out on to kitchen roll. Make the dressing by taking a good **pinch of sea salt** and grind to a paste with a **clove of garlic** before whisking in **½tsp minced lemon zest, 3tbsp lemon juice, and 5tbsp olive oil**.

- If you grow bitter leaves, such as endives and chicory, try them with this **citrus dressing**: whisk together **½tsp of minced orange zest** (navel or clementine, the variety is up to you), **2tbsp freshly squeezed orange juice, 1tbsp white wine vinegar** and a **good pinch of salt** before adding **3tbsp olive oil** (not fruity or too strongly flavoured).

Fennel pollen and elderflowers

Try collecting fennel pollen from wild or garden plants, store in a jam jar and sprinkle over roast or braised pork for an intensely aromatic flavour combination, or add the pollen to pastry for savoury tarts or fennel-scented parmesan cheese biscuits. Towards the end of the month, start looking out for elderflowers to use in jellies and cordials and to flavour syrup for poached peaches.



Herbs for cooks

From spearmint to French tarragon, herb expert Jekka McVicar lists the essential culinary herbs that no gardener cook should be without

WORDS JEKKA McVICAR PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Herbs quite simply transform a meal into a feast – they not only make the food look and taste appealing, they also stimulate the digestion and are one of the essential ingredients that make a meal come alive. Furthermore, they look beautiful in the garden or in containers and, as many of the culinary herbs are from the *Lamiaceae* family, including thyme, rosemary, sage, oregano, mint and basil, they are very attractive to bees and butterflies.

Of all the herbs I grow, the one I believe is most synonymous with summer is basil (including Greek and Thai basil, described on page 16). It conjures up thoughts of the Mediterranean, sitting outside on a warm evening and sharing a meal with the family, be it pizza, where the basil can be added to the dough, a salad, or a panna cotta, where the custard is flavoured with basil, or simply to make 'a refreshing tisane (a herbal tea). In Greece, basil is a sign of welcome and you find pots placed at the entrance to the home or on the table where it is not only a great fly repellent but also a mosquito repellent – rubbing crushed leaves on to the skin will help you avoid being bitten. My top tip for growing this herb successfully in the UK, where our summers can be unpredictable and prone to cold spells at night, is to water your containers in the morning before you go to work, never at night, as this will stop the plants sulking and 'damping off'.

Another herb from the Mediterranean that is incredibly useful in the kitchen, is savory. There are varying forms of this herb but, for our UK climate, the one

that is the most robust is winter savory (*Satureja montana*). The leaves have a fiery, peppery flavour eaten straight from the bush and, when cooked, this flavour infuses into the food, cutting down on the amount of salt required for extra seasoning and aiding digestion, especially if the dish is predominantly beans or pulses.

If asked which herb I could not survive without, it would be mint, such as spearmint 'Tashkent' (*Mentha spicata* 'Tashkent', described on page 16), for not only does it look great in flower in any border where it can be covered in butterflies and bees, it has many diverse uses in the kitchen. For example, the leaves can be used in both sweet and savoury dishes, it makes cold or hot tisanes, it is amazing in cocktails such as mojitos and, similar to basil, it deters mosquitoes when the crushed leaves are rubbed on to the skin.

Herbs are essential for our everyday wellbeing as they not only provide flavour and additional nutritional benefits to food, but also maintain a healthy ecosystem in the garden. Even if you have space for only a few pots, herbs are guaranteed to lift your spirits and transform your meals. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Jekka's Herb Farm, Rose Cottage, Shellards Lane, Alveston, Bristol BS35 3SY.

Tel 01454 418878.

Email sales@jekkasherbfarm.com

Website jekkasherbfarm.com

Open The farm holds open days for the public. Check the calendar on the website.

• Turn the page for 12 of Jekka's recommended herbs ▶



Jekka gathers marigolds to use the petals in her cooking. Her herb garden is a riot of colour during summer when plants such as the pink- and blue-flowered hyssop are in bloom.

12 essential herbs

1 Spearmint (*Mentha spicata* 'Tashkent')

A hardy, herbaceous perennial with mauve flowers and textured, scented leaves. Good with potatoes, salads and in mint sauce. Grown from root or tip cuttings only. 80cm.

2 Common sage (*Salvia officinalis*) Frost-hardy, evergreen perennial with purple, edible flowers and aromatic leaves. Good flavour. Can be grown from seed. 45cm.

3 Thai basil (*Ocimum basilicum* 'Horapha')

A frost-tender annual that has small, pale mulberry-coloured flowers and aniseed-scented leaves. Only grown from seed. 30cm.

4 Greek basil (*Ocimum minimum*) Frost-tender annual with white flowers. Small, aromatic leaves. Use in salads and cheese dishes. Only grown from seed. 23cm.

5 Borage (*Borago officinalis* 'Alba')

Frost-hardy annual with white flowers that can be used in drinks and salads. Young leaves are great in salads or chilled soup. Only grown from seed. 45cm.

6 Wild rocket (*Diplotaxis muralis*) Fully hardy, herbaceous perennial with yellow flowers in summer. Leaves are delicious in salads. Can be grown from seed. 75cm.

7 Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)

Fully hardy, herbaceous perennial. Mild onion flavour. Add to salads, egg and cheese dishes. Can be grown from seed. 30cm.

8 French tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*)

Frost-hardy, herbaceous perennial. Aromatic leaves have an aniseed flavour. Grown from root or tip cuttings only. 90cm.

9 Winter savory (*Satureja montana*) Fully hardy, perennial, semi-evergreen. Has small, white flowers. Good for salt-free diets. Can be grown from seed. 30cm.

10 Pot marigold (*Calendula officinalis*)

Frost-hardy annual with orange flowers. Petals are lovely in salads, pastry and butters. Only grown from seed. 45cm.

11 Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*)

Fully hardy, herbaceous perennial with blue flowers (good for drinks) and slightly bitter leaves. Use young leaves and flowers in salads. Can be grown from seed. 1m.

12 Hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*)

Fully hardy perennial with dark-blue flowers. Aromatic leaves have a bitter, minty flavour. Good with fatty fish and meat. Can be grown from seed. 80cm.





Best of both worlds

The kitchen garden is not just about sowing, growing and eating. Vegetables can also improve ecology, encourage birds and bees, and offer colour and diversity when allowed to flower and reproduce. You could even bring flowers from the vegetable plot inside

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS PETER BAUWENS

All vegetables produce flowers, even though most people with a vegetable garden have never seen them. When we look at vegetables as flowering plants, there are roughly two types. Most vegetables produce flowers in order to form an edible product. Peas, beans and pumpkins are examples. So when you cut these flowers, you don't get the food.

The second group will only produce flowers if you leave them alone. So, if you leave the last of your radishes, a few side shoots of your broccoli or a few leeks in your garden, you will get a second 'crop' in their flowering stage.

However, while all vegetables produce flowers, not all of them are suitable for cutting. The following are suggestions of those that do work well and can create stunning bouquets of their own.

You can start in spring with broad beans. They are available in pure-white, black-and-white, pink and crimson flowering types. They have a sweet scent, so it's hard to resist cutting a few of them at flowering time. I always grow a broad variety of radishes in white, red, pink and purple and we never manage to eat them all in time. But a month later they produce masses of small flowers on their spreading branches in shades of pink, white, cream and purple. The same thing happens with too much rocket. Once the weather heats up, the plants run to seed with masses of beautiful creamy flowers, ready to cut.

Summer means brassicas. Broccoli is my absolute favourite brassica, for eating and for the pale-yellow edible flowers. Perennial leek and elephant garlic produce large, pink allium flowers on top of sturdy metre-high stems.

Fennel is the type of plant that often runs to seed too fast. So if you lose the crop, you can still harvest the yellow umbel flowers. Peas and beans have wonderful flowers, but their flowers stems are much too short for cutting. Runner beans are excellent, however. These vigorous climbing beans produce masses of flowers, so cutting a few to bring inside won't harm the harvest.

Some vegetables, such as carrots, beets and black salsify, are biennials and will only produce seeds in their second year after overwintering. If you treat them badly or the growing season is erratic, they often produce flowers at the end of their first year. Carrots produce a solid stem with a whole series of pure-white, almost lacy, umbel flowers over a long period. Don't expect too much from beets, but their colourful flowering stems, flower buds and seeds are functional in any flower arrangement. Black salsify (*Scorzonera hispanica*) makes wonderful yellow, dandelion-like flowers on high stems, that add a wonderful vanilla-chocolate scent to your bouquet.

Sea kale (*Crambe maritima*) is a perfect plant as it can be blanched beneath a pot to keep shoots sweet and tender before harvesting and will still produce flowers. But the queen of the flowering vegetable must be the artichoke, although it's quite hard not to harvest them for the kitchen. So, first cut the big heads for eating and let the smaller heads on the side shoots turn to beautiful purple flowers.

All these tall, robust plants could make you forget the smaller ones. The oysterleaf (*Mertensia maritima*) is a wonderful perennial that produces unique blue flowers. The stems are rather fragile, but long enough for the vase. So cut a few for their unique colour.

As we get to autumn, the seeds of many plants need our attention. Orach (*Atriplex hortensis*) has the same yellow, green and red colouring in its leaves as in the autumn stems and seedpods. Nobody notices quinoa much until the seeds start to ripen, but over a month the large, thick seedheads turn to bright yellow, gold, orange, dark red and pink. Millet is another grain that is useful for food as well as for cutting. Tree spinach (*Chenopodium giganteum* 'Magentaspreen') needs some extra care and the removal of most of its leaves to survive in a vase, but the bright magenta tops are a delight in any flower arrangement.

Herbs will produce flowers all summer long and they make a nice addition to vegetable flowers. Coriander is often very quick to produce fragile umbel flowers in white with a shade of pink, and dill does almost the same in soft yellow. Sage produces sturdy stems and large, purple flowers, while parsley flowers are modest in green and grey. With their upright habit, chives and garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*) have perfect cut flowers, in pink and white, while mint and basil will not only bring colour but also a refined scent to your bouquet. For something a bit different, try flowering shiso (*Perilla frutescens*) and lemon verbena (*Aloysia citrodora*) in your compositions, together with water pepper (*Persicaria hydropiper*).

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Most flowers of vegetables can be used for flower arrangements, but to make them last, they need some extra care. Cut your flowers in the late afternoon or evening, so they have a cool and dark night ahead to settle. Remove the lower leaves and any large, soft leaves from the stems. Put the stems in warm/hot water, and refresh the water every two days. Place the flowers in a light location, with no direct sunlight and no draft. This extra care will enable you to keep the flowers in fine condition for almost a week.

The flowers of vegetables and herbs often have a very specific scent. A vase full of leeks or cabbage may be suitable for the kitchen but not for the living room. For something more soothing, use the sweet vanilla scent of black salsify or the fresh lime of verbena, while the scent of carrots or sea kale is great for freshening up a room.

All alliums, kales, radishes, sea kale, dill, coriander, beans, rocket and black salsify flowers are edible, so if you wish you could even put an edible bouquet on the table and eat it during dinner.

Using vegetable flowers for cutting might seem a bit of an adventure, but they're not really that different from more 'regular' cutting flowers. Take a few flowers to catch the eye, add colourful stems and seedheads on a second level, then end with some green structural material. You will be surprised with the original and unexpected material that you can harvest from your vegetables, making this a great way to enjoy your garden even more. □

Bouquet 1 Delicate shades



Plants

1 Asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*)

A useful, basic green. Flowers July to November.

2 Garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*)

Strong, sturdy stems and pure-white flowers that will last for ten days. July to October.

3 Lemon verbena (*Aloysia citrodora*)

Can easily be grown in a pot. October.

4 Cabbage (*Brassica rapa*)

Any brassica will work, but this cabbage produces edible and sweetly scented flowers from April to November.

5 Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

Can make a bouquet on its own. August to November.

6 Tree spinach (*Chenopodium giganteum*)

A huge plant that will re-seed. August to November.

7 Oyster leaf (*Mertensia maritima*)

A useful hardy perennial. April and September.

8 Chinese broccoli (*Brassica oleracea Alboglabra*

Group) Also known as *kai-lan*, this fast-growing broccoli with lots of side shoots, offers edible white flowers from spring to autumn from several sowings.

Bouquet 2 Contrasting colours



Plants

1 Carrot (*Daucus carota*)

Delightful, lacy umbels for months. July to November.

2 Garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*)

See page 19.

3 Red orach (*Atriplex hortensis* var. *rubra*)

Similar to spinach, a leafy vegetable that is very useful in bouquets. September to October.

4 Chinese broccoli (*Brassica oleracea* Alboglabra Group)

See page 19.

5 Red basil (*Ocimum basilicum* 'Purpurascens')

Dark wine-coloured foliage and a perfect scent. August to October.

6 Leek (*Allium ampeloprasum* Porrum Group)

Useful, long-lasting flowers in August and September.

Bouquet 3 Striking shapes



Plants

- 1 Red orach (*Atriplex hortensis* var. *rubra*)**
Colourful shades of dark red to green in seeds and leaves. September and October.
- 2 *Cynara cardunculus* Scolymus Group (globe artichoke)** Perhaps the most spectacular of all flowering vegetables. July and October.
- 3 Leek (*Allium ampeloprasum* Porrum Group)** See facing page.
- 4 Runner bean (*Phaseolus coccineus* 'Sunset')** Runner beans can offer white, red or bicour flowers. This attractive heritage cultivar is a pale peach. August to October.
- 5 Orach (*Atriplex hortensis*)** Colourful shades of pale green in seeds and leaves. September to October.
- 6 Chinese broccoli (*Brassica oleracea* Alboglabra Group)** See page 19.

Bouquet 4 Fresh tones



Plants

1 Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)

Fragile annual that runs to seed and flowers all too easily. July to October.

2 Cabbage (*Brassica rapa*)

See page 19.

3 Orach (*Atriplex hortensis*)

See page 21.

4 Leek (*Allium ampeloprasum*

Porrum Group) See page 20.

5 Quinoa (*Chenopodium quinoa*)

Comes in bright

reds, oranges and purples.

Flowers for more than a

month. August to September.

6 Chinese broccoli (*Brassica oleracea*

Alboglabra Group)

See page 19.

- For information on when to sow and harvest crops see page 104.

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Other vegetables and herbs for cut flower options

1 Broad bean (*Vicia faba*) White flowers with pink veining and darker splodges. April to June.

2 Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*) Produces pinky-white umbels of delicate, lacy flowers. Summer.

3 Elephant garlic (*Allium ampeloprasum* var. *ampeloprasum*) Globe flowers atop spike. Early summer.

4 Pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*) Grown for its feathery flower spikes. July to September.

5 Shiso (*Perilla frutescens*) Deeply cut, nettle-like leaves with pink, tubular flowers. Summer.

6 Okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*) Cream-coloured flowers with a purple eye. June to September.

7 Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) Textured, aromatic leaves with mauve flower. May to July for flowers.

8 Black salsify (*Scorzonera hispanica*) Yellow, dandelion-like flower in its second year. Summer.

9 Sea kale (*Crambe maritima*) Glaucous, crinkly edged leaves and panicles of white flowers. May to August.



Although not essential, a greenhouse is ideal for growing salads or giving veg crops a good start before planting out.

Tips for sowing seeds

The act of sowing a seed is perfectly simple, but making sure you always read the packet, plan ahead and find the right method will ensure successful germination every time

WORDS KATIE DUTTON

Choose your sowing method

Direct sowing

If you are sowing seeds for vegetables that have tap roots, such as carrots, parsnips and turnips, or simply don't want the hassle of replanting your seeds from trays, direct sowing is best into weed-free, relatively fine soil. If planting in rows, draw your trowel or tool edge along the soil to create a shallow channel. Sow seed thinly according to the seed packet instruction, then draw the soil back over the seeds and gently water. Alternatively, if your seeds are of a reasonable size to handle individually, you can use a dibber or pencil to create small holes and space your seeds out accordingly, evenly dispersing them over your prepared area. Label at both ends of the row to avoid confusion when spring comes.

Sowing under glass

If the soil isn't warm enough outside (see temperature) or is too heavy, or you want to give your seedlings a sure start, try sowing in pots indoors or under glass in a greenhouse. Water your compost first and let the moisture permeate through the soil, then gently press it into a container to get rid of any air holes. Small seeds work best in a seed tray, large seeds in small pots. Evenly space your seeds in their container, leaving enough room to enable you to thin the plants out without damaging them and ensure that the seeds don't compete and stunt growth. Cover with a thin layer of seed compost and label. Some gardeners like to use a top dressing of vermiculite to help regulate moisture. Once your seedlings have their first set of true leaves, thin out and pot on, eventually planting them out to their final position once all risk of frost has passed.

Multiblock sowing

If you're short on space, multiblock sowing may be the answer; it also uses less compost and takes less time you can plant multiple vegetables all at once. With this method, seeds are grown in clusters to create 'baby' vegetables, ideal for leeks, onions and round carrots. Fill a module tray with pre-watered compost and sow three to five seeds in a shallow hole, then lightly cover with grit. Do not thin out the seedlings, but instead wait for their first true leaves to grow, then plant them out to the correct spacing as directed on the seed packet.

Other tips for success...

Plan ahead

Use a calendar or a seasonal guide (see page 104) to plan your vegetable growing for the year ahead and ensure your kitchen garden flourishes all year round. As well as learning when to expect fresh, seasonal produce, using a calendar will deter gluts and shortages. There is also a lot of produce, such as salads, that you can sow in succession to ensure a longer harvest. In the UK, seed sowing generally begins in February with salad crops and finishes in autumn with the planting of broad beans for the following summer.

Choose fresh compost

When it comes to compost, fresh, shop-bought products are best; they generally encourage more germination than homemade composts as they are free from pests and diseases and have low levels of nutrients (high levels are unnecessary for seeds to grow). Stored compost from the previous year will have deteriorated, so is best avoided.

Check the temperature

Before direct sowing outside, check that the soil is sufficiently warm – ideally above 8°C. Don't be put off if it's not quite warm enough, however, as some crops germinate at lower temperatures. Alternatively, you can use horticultural fleece, available from all good garden centres, to generate warmth and protect the newly sown area.

Use eco containers

Garden centres have started to introduce recyclable containers, but you can save money and resources by reusing any old plastic pots you already have (make sure to wash them first) or use everyday packaging found at home. Egg boxes, along with fruit and vegetable punnets work well as containers for small seeds, while cardboard tubes from kitchen and toilet rolls are suitable for larger seeds.

Don't forget...

If you don't fancy sowing seed or miss the ideal month, you can buy plug plants that have already germinated and have been grown on to sturdy little plants, ready to simply plant them up into your own plot. This is also a good way of trying just a few of a wide range of veg to see which you enjoy growing most.

Visit [rhs.org.uk](https://www.rhs.org.uk) for more tips on sowing seeds, and see our seasonal sowing guide on page 104 for the best times to sow. See page 106 for our favourite vegetable seed suppliers.



SUMMER NOTES

As spring turns to summer, Jojo makes the most of warmer days with regular visits to her allotment, but finds much of her time is spent juggling the competing demands of kitchen and garden

WORDS JOJO TULLOH ILLUSTRATIONS SARAH YOUNG

June

In the garden

Children understand the satisfaction of arranging things. Whether it's plastic animals or the inside of a doll's house, making orderly groups is something we learn to enjoy early and it is a pleasure that stays with us. My kitchen windowsill holds various succulents and pelargoniums with lemon-scented leaves along with two tiny lead figures: a lady in a flowing blue dress and a mechanic carrying a can of petrol. While washing up I like to imagine these two playing out scenes beneath the various leaves. Rearranging my window-scape is good occupational therapy and perhaps that is why I find June gardening so pleasing. Nothing makes me happier than setting out for my plot with a shallow basket packed with well-grown courgettes, beans, tomatoes and squash plants ready to set out.

I have some idea where they'll each go but the act of putting them in is always a spur to creativity. I love the combination of egg-yolk yellow courgette flowers with vivid, jewel-coloured dahlias. This year, step-over apples under-planted with strawberries and marigolds made a pattern worthy of William Morris. In the bed next door, two-tone violet and white turnips (Rapa Tonda a Colletto Viola from Franchi Seeds), 'Boltardy' beetroot and Swiss Chard 'Fordhook Giant', with its glossy, crumpled, dark-green leaves, compete for the most luxuriant foliage. A bed cleared of early potatoes is sown with a salad mixture – Misticanza di Lattughe from Franchi Seeds – which includes a selection of meltingly soft butterhead lettuces. Chiltern Seeds also has a mix of 20 different leaves.

When I cycle down the canal to my allotment in June the banks are thick with elderflowers and comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*). Recognisable by its hairy, shield-shaped leaves and hooded purple flowers, comfrey is a wonderful compost plant. Its leaves are exceptionally rich in potash as well as containing beneficial amounts of nitrogen and phosphate. The leaves work as a compost activator:



use them to line a potato trench or later on as a mulch between potato plants. You can pack the foliage down into a barrel with a weight on top and make a tea, which works as a fantastic tomato feed, or mix the leaves with leaf mould to make a base for potting compost. If you feel adventurous, eat the leaves dipped in batter. They are, says Geoffrey Grigson in *The Englishman's Flora*, 'the most delicious of all wild foods both to the eye, for the viridian leaf in the golden batter and the taste'. You can use the wild form as compost (and I have gathered bagfuls from the canal towpath) but the most useful as a fertiliser is 'Bocking 14', a cultivar of Russian comfrey *Symphytum x uplandicum*. It should be a must on any vegetable garden. You can buy a pack of five root cuttings from organiccatalogue.com. Likewise, if you have an overgrown area thick with nettles, scythe them down and add to a barrel of water to make a similarly nutrient-rich liquid feed.

In the kitchen

The June garden offers many a delight for gourmets. Abundance is yet to come; these are more rarefied pleasures. Baby artichokes, eaten raw when very young and tender, need nothing more than superior, extra virgin olive oil and salt to provide a first course of startling simplicity. Allow two very fresh baby artichokes for each person. Cut a fresh end on each artichoke stem (left 8cm or so long) and lay them on a platter; no need to cook. Give each guest a small bowl filled with olive oil sprinkled liberally with sea salt. Peel away the tough outer leaves until you get to the pale lemon-coloured leaves tipped with pink. Dip each leaf into the oil at its base. Cut the heart in two and dip into the seasoned oil; this young there is no hairy choke.

The digging up of the first early potatoes, with their translucent, papery skins, is something I look forward to with great anticipation. Boil them simply, or cook in a packet. To do this scrape, dot with cubes of butter (15g for every six potatoes), add salt and a few sprigs



Baby artichokes are a rarefied pleasure and a delight for gourmets. Eaten raw when very young and tender, they need nothing more than superior, extra virgin olive oil and salt to provide a first course of startling simplicity

of thyme and wrap up in baking parchment with the ends folded over several times. Cook in a hot oven (220°C) for 45 minutes.

Walnuts, should you have a tree, can be chopped with capers and shallots to dress an onglet steak, added to a beef stew or eaten with bread and cheese. Now is the time to brine them as they need to be picked when soft and green (cut in half or stick a pin into one to see if the hard inner skin has formed). Take 1kg of green walnuts, prick all over with a pin, cover with water and stir in 120g sea salt. Cover and leave for a week before draining and repeating with fresh brine. Drain the walnuts and lay on a tray; in a few days they will be black. Put 500ml malt vinegar, 250g brown sugar, half a teaspoon of allspice, half a teaspoon of cloves, six black peppercorns and one tablespoon of freshly grated root ginger in a pan and bring to the boil, then add the walnuts and simmer for 15 minutes. Decant into preserving jars, washed in soapy water and then heated in a warm oven (160°C) for ten minutes to sterilise and store somewhere cool and dark.

Now is also the season for effortless outdoor lunches of mixed garden salads made pretty with borage and hyssop flowers, eaten with good bread and soft cheeses. With animals out to pasture, the rich, creamy milk of early summer is being made into superlative raw-milk cheeses such as St Jude, a cow's milk cheese from Suffolk, Tynsboro and Sleightlett, both made with goat's milk in Somerset, or Bartlett, a ewe's milk cheese also from Somerset. For an Italian take, arrange a pile of shelled walnuts alongside wild rocket and ricotta.

What to sow

- Watering and weeds are two things on gardeners' minds in early summer. Seedlings should be watered little and often; larger plants heavily and only once a week to encourage roots to form further down where there is more nourishment. Bare soil should never be left idle. Pop in module-grown lettuces or sow radishes, nasturtiums or calendula. If you get chickweed or other annual weeds, let them grow but dig them in before they seed so they can release their nutrients into the soil.
- Plant chicory and endive from the end of June then protect plants over winter and you will have greens until Christmas. Try 'Cornet de Bordeaux', an old French cultivar of broad-leaved endive (escarole) with loose, wavy interior foliage. To blanch, tie the leaves together so the heart stays white and sweet, or pop a flower pot over the plant, covering the drainage hole. Also good is the fris e-type endive 'Pancalieri' – both from Seedaholic (see page 106). Chicory 'Catalogna Frastagliata' from Franchi Seeds has a white rib and serrated leaf. Wilt and add it to chickpeas and pancetta.

What to cook

The first local strawberries of the year are exciting, but it is the later crop of smaller berries that has the finer flavour. Why not serve your carefully reared fruits in a little glass of Beaujolais? Our modern strawberries are the result of cross-breeding between Virginian and Chilean strawberries towards the end of the 18th century. Before that all we had was the native wild strawberry, *Fragaria vesca*, which is small and a little seedy but finely flavoured. In Europe you find *Fragaria moschata*, also called hautbois, hautboy or musk strawberry, with a dark mulberry colour, an intense scent and a taste somewhere between raspberry, strawberry and pineapple. Found on restaurant menus in France and Italy, it is not widely cultivated in the UK but can be grown from seed and makes good, fast-growing groundcover. Add a handful of these wild strawberries to this sloppy jam, halfway between a compote and a preserve, to enhance the flavour.

Strawberry jam

Take **1kg strawberries** small and sweet and a **handful of wild strawberries**, wash them briefly before you hull (that way water does not get into the hole and spoil the flavour). Toss the berries in **750g sugar** and **3tbsp lemon juice**. Leave to macerate until the sugar has dissolved (about 2 hours). Then, in a jam pan, cook over a low heat and allow the mixture to slowly break down into a thick crimson syrup. At this point, increase the heat and boil hard for 5 minutes, then take off the heat and do the wrinkle test (put a drop of jam on a cold saucer and push it to see if it wrinkles). Boil again briefly if not set, skim off any scum and decant into clean jars and keep in the fridge.

July

In the garden

It is with a hollow laugh that I greet the advice offered in some vegetable growing manuals to ‘sit back and enjoy the fruits of your labours’. For me, a vegetable garden in July is like a river in full spate, the growth of weeds and crops both equally relentless. Courgettes and cucumbers never seem to stop coming, the dahlias, sunflowers and cosmos need picking or deadheading and pumpkins need feeding. Every corner of the plot seems to scream for attention, and that’s even before you begin the process of turning produce into plenty. Your ability to stay afloat depends on how much work you have put in during the previous months.

In other years I have wasted many hot, summer hours hacking down overgrown paths and watering parched, under-mulched earth. This year I made myself put aside regular days in winter for laying down paths underlaid with weed-resistant fabric and covered in woodchip. To help lock moisture into the soil, I spent mornings barrowing down manure to spread over bare earth. This preparation should leave me time to prepare a bed for winter salads – sown now, I hope it will see me through to spring (if planted any earlier many of these crops would have been plagued by flea beetles).

My mantra in July is hoe, weed, stake. Each time I set out for my allotment I make sure a ball of string and secateurs are in one of the pockets of my dungarees. Regular short visits to the allotment are the ideal I strive for in summer, but don’t always achieve. Running my hoe along rows of beetroot and turnip is far more effective if done frequently. My favourite time to go is very early in the morning just as the poppies open. Even city air seems fresh at this hour. I cycle back past the queuing lines of commuter cars and arrive home just as everyone else is waking up. I set our breakfast table with a swag of sky-blue borage and eye-popping orange calendula, and a bowl of strawberries and redcurrants. It’s a treat money can’t buy.



Despite my best intentions, one thing I never seem to do in time is stake my tomatoes. The night before we departed for a holiday in Greece I was down on the plot late into the evening struggling to tie up floppy tomato plants and force sticks into the sun-baked ground. My friend’s method of growing two metre-plus ‘Alicante’ tomato plants up a string suspended from a horizontal pole started to seem far more sensible. When we reached the island of Andros I admired one market gardener’s unsightly but effective method of keeping the fruits off the ground – the straggling tomato plants were laid over upturned plastic vegetable crates. If you are growing tomatoes in pots, be sure to keep them regularly watered to prevent blossom end rot (dark, sunken patches on the fruit).

In the kitchen

The currant is a real asset in any kitchen garden. They are heavy croppers, require low maintenance and the berries can be expensive to buy in any quantity. Most importantly, the flavour of jellies, tarts, jams, cordials and puddings made with currants is superb. I have four plants: two red and two black. They ripen over about a month and I usually throw a bit of black netting around the bushes to keep off the birds. I love the smell and rubbery feel of blackcurrant berries when picking in hot sun, and the way a bowl of redcurrants gleams in candlelight.

As the season is quite short, I freeze lots. I use some to make the Swedish dish, *Rårörda röda vinbär* (raw moved redcurrants). It’s an uncooked dish, very simple to prepare, requiring only sugar and a little preparation time. Take 200g of redcurrants washed and picked clean of the stalks. Add 85g of sugar and stir. Leave for three or four hours until the sugar has dissolved, stirring once or twice. Decant into a clip-top jar and store in the fridge (use within a week). You can use it in crêpes or cakes, on your muesli, or to accompany meat.



Currants are a real asset in any kitchen garden. They are heavy croppers, require little maintenance and can be expensive to buy in any quantity. More importantly, their flavour in jellies, tarts, jams and cordials is superb

Eliza Acton (1799-1859) was our first truly modern cookery writer. Her book *Modern Cookery for Private Families* (first published in 1845) was the first aimed at the inexperienced cook, and her inclusion of accurate quantities and cooking times was innovative. Hugely successful and influential in its day and much plagiarised (step forward Mrs Beeton), it still holds appeal today thanks to Acton's clear prose (she first published as a poet) and concise instructions. My favourite is the chapter on preserves, jam-packed with delights such as rhubarb, green gooseberry and greengage jams. The recipes are clearly the result of first-hand experience, evidenced by Acton's very pertinent 'Obs' (observations). Acton notes some readers found that her redcurrant jelly while 'of the finest flavour, is scarcely firm enough for the table'. It does have a rather runny set but don't let this deter you – it has ten times the flavour of commercially produced jellies.

Here is her Superlative Red Currant Jelly recipe. 'Strip carefully from the stems some quite ripe currants of the finest quality, and mix with an equal weight of good sugar reduced to powder; boil these together quickly for exactly eight minutes, keep them stirred all the time, and clear off the scum – which will be very abundant – as it rises; then turn the preserve into a very clean sieve, and put into small jars the jelly which runs through it, and which will be delicious in flavour, and of the brightest colour. It should be carried immediately, when this is practicable, to an extremely cool but not a damp place, and left there until perfectly cold. Currants: 3lbs, sugar 3lbs, 8 minutes.'

What to sow

- With all this activity it's easy to forget about successional sowing. There is still time to sow extra rows of beetroot (the striped pink and white 'Chioggia' is essential), turnips, spinach, salad onions and fast-growing carrots.
- Now is the time to harvest garlic and main crop onions. I lay mine out on upturned wooden apple crates for a few days to dry out. I rub the dusty, papery skins off the garlic and trim their roots, then tie them as skilfully as I can manage. The singular taste of fresh onions is another treat available only to those who grow their own. I take home several green onions to eat in sandwiches with cheese.
- Looking forward to winter, my salad bed includes rows of radicchio 'Rossa di Treviso' planted in late June and the soft buttery leaves of mâche or lamb's lettuce, the succulent leaves of miner's lettuce, also called winter purslane, rows of mizuna and mibuna and the mustard 'Green-in-Snow'. This, along with self-seeding rocket, should provide me with many months of vivid green, peppery salad leaves.

What to cook

Globe artichokes

Now that the heads are larger and tougher, globe artichokes are best boiled and eaten leaf by leaf with a mustard vinaigrette or melted butter with a little lemon juice. Take a large stainless steel pan and add **2tbsp olive oil, 1tbsp white wine vinegar, 1 small glass of white wine, 1tbsp fennel and coriander seeds and 2 bay leaves**. Bring to the boil and put on the lid. Add 1 artichoke per person, stems trimmed. Cover with cold water and simmer for 30-40 minutes, drain upside down in a colander then eat while lukewarm with a vinaigrette made from olive oil, wine vinegar and Dijon mustard.

Baked courgette flowers

Courgette flowers fried in a thin, crisp batter are an annual summer ritual, but you can stuff and bake them instead. The basic filling is either ricotta or curd cheese flavoured with herbs and lemon zest (you could add chopped olives). For four people allow **3 flowers each**, take **300g soft cheese**, drain off any watery liquid then take **3tbsp finely grated parmesan**, the **zest of 1 lemon**, finely grated, **1tbsp olive oil, salt and pepper** and **6-8 basil leaves** (ideally lemon basil), chopped. Mix the filling then remove the stamens (careful not to tear the petals), spoon the filling in, and twist the ends of the flower together to hold the filling. Preheat oven to 180°C, arrange the flowers on a baking tray, zigzag over a little more oil, and bake for 6-8 minutes until the filling is warm but the flowers are still soft, not crisp.

August

In the garden

Shunning the practical for a moment, I want to pause for thought. In the month when sultry days slow the pace of life, it's time to make the case for the vegetable garden as a place to revel in beauty. There is a newly minted quality to freshly picked fruit and vegetables that makes them objects worthy of admiration quite apart from their culinary qualities; it's no accident that the still life has been a subject popular with artists from the 17th century onward, many of whom chose fruit and flowers as their subjects.

From Chardin's strawberries to Fantin-Latour's nasturtiums, painters have delighted in the exquisite shapes and subtle colours revealed in nature; so should you. Set aside time for contemplation and stroll round your plot with a painter's eye, pausing to observe the hoverfly as it skims past, or a drop of water as it rolls off a rhubarb leaf. Consider which combinations are most pleasing and make a note of them. Take some photos to remind you, in colder months, of the glory. You can pick as you wander but make a conscious effort to appreciate what you have made. Try not to focus on failures; instead delight in the garden as it is. Early morning is ideal.

I have a small pergola (very small) jutting off my shed and it is here that I shelter from the sun. In high summer it is engulfed in vine leaves. I put my deckchair under this tent of green and bask in the filtered green light. When I can stir myself, I gather a basket of yellow squash, cucumbers and assorted flowers and head home to gloat over my crops. I may never get around to painting them but I love arranging little vegetable tableaux. It might be a pile of tightly closed artichoke heads, their green armour-plating giving no hint of the tender flesh inside, or the pale-green bend of the trombone courgette among mounds of red and green striped tomatoes, with bulbs of garlic whose white, tissue paper-covered heads reveal cloves that are streaked pink and purple. Up on the counter



pyramids of speckled pink and green borlotti pods sit in front of a vase filled with bright splashes of yellow sunflowers, white and deep pink cosmos, and the sky-blue stars of borage blossom.

Alice B Toklas puts it perfectly in her eponymous 1954 cookbook: 'The first gathering in of salads, radishes and herbs made me feel like a mother about her baby – how could anything so beautiful be mine? And this emotion of wonder filled me for each vegetable as it was gathered every year. There is nothing that is comparable to it, as satisfactory or as thrilling, as gathering the vegetables one has grown.'

In the kitchen

August cooking puts one in a slight predicament – produce is at its most plentiful but you may not feel like cooking. One way around this is either to put dishes together extremely rapidly just before eating or bake them long and slow in the cool of the day and eat much later at room temperature. Toiling over a hot stove is very much to be avoided. A few baby courgettes sliced and cooked with lemon and butter and garnished with chives make a good open sandwich with goat's cheese. Try a slice of superior feta alongside basil and garden tomatoes zigzagged with extra virgin olive oil, or summer savory chopped fine and added to a dish of sliced tomatoes and new season onions, cut into paper-thin slices, drizzled with olive oil and sherry vinegar. Ring the changes with salad by using mustard leaves dressed with a sesame and soy vinaigrette and garnished with spring onions and calendula petals. Whisk together one teaspoon of soy sauce, two teaspoons of rice vinegar, two tablespoons of sesame oil and 80ml of light olive oil with a pinch of sugar.

Fresh tomatoes still warm from the sun are a glorious thing but so are the dried variety. I always bring back bags of leathery-looking



My summer vegetable tableaux might include a pile of tightly closed artichoke heads, their green armour-plating giving no hint of the tender flesh inside, or the pale-green bend of a trombone courgette

dried tomatoes from Greece to add to winter stews and meat sauces. I long for a Mediterranean sun to dry our summer glut of tomatoes on trays on the roof, but this recipe approximates that concentrated taste. These slow-roasted tomatoes can be added to green salads with roast chicken leftovers and garlic croutons for a meal in a bowl, or eaten on top of very thin toast brushed with olive oil and baked in the oven until golden and brittle. Halve your tomatoes and scoop out the seeds, lay them cut side up on a baking tray, oil them a little and season with salt, pepper, a scrap of sugar and either dried oregano or some crumbled dried chilli peppers. Roast at 140°C for up to three hours (checking after two). When cool, cover with olive oil and keep in the fridge for up to a week.

One way of adding interest to vegetable dishes is through the addition of spice and nut blends. The Egyptian spice and nut mix, *dukkah*, is traditionally eaten by first dipping flat bread in olive oil and then the spice mix but it is also a good way of showing off your finest raw vegetables (or on crushed avocado on toast for breakfast). This recipe comes from Jill Norman's *Herbs & Spices* (Dorling Kindersley, 2015). Take 120g sesame seeds and 90g hazelnuts, 60g coriander seeds, 30g each of cumin seeds, salt to taste. Dry roast the ingredients separately in a heavy frying pan until the sesame is golden and the hazelnuts are losing their skins, rub the skins off the hazelnuts (in a tea towel works well). Grind to a fine, crushed mixture. Store in a jar. □

What to sow

- Sow a few more rows of successional vegetables, such as beetroot, spinach, lettuce, turnips and radishes; keep a close eye on courgettes lest they swell into marrows; and deadhead flowers.
- On smaller plots where long rotations are not possible you might get potato sickness (pale leaves and stunted plants with few tubers), caused by potato eelworms (*Heterodera rostochiensis*). One way to prevent this is to sow a green manure of mustard immediately after lifting your potato crop. The mustard hardens the crop of cysts from which the eelworms hatch. The organic guru Lawrence Hills describes how the unemployed allotment holders of Jarrow in the 1930s employed a very tight rotation. They kept one side of their garden for potatoes (a second early variety to allow for cabbage and leeks to follow through the winter) and the other side for everything else, switching every year and always following with mustard. Lift your potatoes then knock the ground even and broadcast the seed, raking it in to cover. When it is green, sappy and rich in nitrogen (8-10 weeks) trample it down and dig in. Always make sure you remove all small potatoes (travellers) as they keep eelworms fed.

What to cook

Courgette tian

A tian is a Provençal dish made of egg and vegetables that is ideal for summer picnics. It takes its name from the shallow terracotta dish it is traditionally cooked in. I use a cast iron skillet instead. The basic mix of vegetables is greens, herbs and potato; use whatever is cropping. You can add flavour with olives, capers, anchovies and a thickish tomato sauce, and switch courgettes for spinach or chard, for instance. My recipe is inspired by that of Elizabeth David.

Take **250g courgettes**, **250g potatoes** (steamed, peeled and cut into cubes), **1 heaped tbsp each of parmesan and gruyère cheese**, **1tbsp finely chopped parsley** and **a few sorrel leaves**, **salt**, **pepper**, **nutmeg** and **garlic**, **5-6 eggs** and **4tbsp olive oil**. Put the cubed potatoes with a little chopped garlic, seasoning and 2tbsp of olive oil in the ovenproof dish and warm through in a low oven (150°C). Grate the courgettes and fry them gently in 2tbsp oil, crush over some salt, cover the pan and cook for five minutes. In a large bowl beat the eggs until frothy, add sorrel, herbs, cheese, salt and pepper, a little grated nutmeg and the courgettes, then stir in the potatoes and tip the whole lot into a well-buttered skillet or gratin dish. Transfer immediately to the oven (otherwise the egg rises up) and bake for 25 minutes at 190°C. Cut into wedges when cool.

- If you find yourself near the herb garden with a glass of sparkling white in hand, pick a leaf of basil or lemon verbena and drop it into your glass.



IN BRIEF

Name Worton Organic Garden.

What Market garden, supplying shop and restaurant.

Where Oxfordshire.

Size Seven acres.

Soil Clay loam.

Climate Sits in its own micro-climate protected from winds by a tall tree line on two sides.

Hardiness rating USDA 8.

Steeped in the soil

At Worton Organic Garden in Oxfordshire,
David and Anneke Blake grow fruit, flowers, herbs and
vegetables for their farm shop and café kitchen

WORDS JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM



All the vegetables, herbs, fruit
and flowers are harvested by hand
with new cultivars added each year.



1 Most of the vegetables grown at Worton Organic find their way into the shop, which is overseen by David. The shop also sells Dutch cheeses, home-made organic sourdough bread and, on one Sunday a month, fresh fish. **2** *Salvia 'Amistad'* has velvety, dark-purple flowers held on almost-black calyces from May to November. **3** Anneke's yellow borders feature some stunning and unusual combinations, such as this broad-leafed *Ricinus communis* 'Gibsonii' amid a sea of tagetes. **4** Two antique rhubarb forcers surrounded by an eclectic selection of plants, including the tall grass *Stipa gigantea*, mint in flower and *Verbascum* seedheads, line the path to the café.

May I introduce Worton Organic Gardens, one of the absolute gems of Oxfordshire, an unbelievably productive (and extraordinarily beautiful) garden surrounding a shop groaning with goodies and a practically perfect little café.

This is the purlieu of David and Anneke Blake both hailing from families steeped in the soil, albeit on opposite sides of the globe. David emigrated to Melbourne aged four and had an eclectic career as publican, music agent and bookseller before meeting Anneke in the Netherlands where her family ran a thriving smallholding in the same street as the renowned Dutch garden designer, the late Henk Gerritsen. It was he who put them in touch with the Oppenheims at Waltham Place in Berkshire where they worked as gardeners at the beginning of the millennium.

A decade or so ago fate (and an advertisement in *Farmers Weekly*) brought them to Worton, where they found a field and a few polytunnels; within a season they had begun to transform it into a thriving garden. "You can make a vegetable garden very quickly," says David. "Vegetables are basically annuals." Over the years it has expanded, initially selling produce at local markets and through a veg box scheme. There are now seven acres under cultivation – fields of fruit trees, avenues of raspberries and currants, polytunnels brimming with unusual salads, and rows and rows of beans, pumpkins, beetroot and spuds. Abundance in abundance, and all of it planted and nurtured by David and a team of cheerful East Timorese gardeners.

In the middle of this is the shop and restaurant, stocked with an array of organic fruit and vegetables as well as the freshest of fish and great wheels of Dutch cheese – from cow, ewe and goat – that bear no resemblance to the scarlet waxed slices of Edam that some of us can remember from childhood. It is all housed in a fabulous home-made shack that keeps expanding: while I was there Anneke was itching to go off and order wood for an extension. David runs the shop and will always steer one towards what is particularly good that week. Anneke is an excellent, though sometimes reluctant, cook who is adept at combining simple but invigorating flavours (often with a tinkle of Indonesia), although she would always rather be gardening.

She is pretty indifferent about growing vegetables and prefers instead to concentrate on growing flowers. As you arrive at Worton Organic you are immediately greeted with long double borders that take your breath away – they are very yellow. "Some people are averse to yellow," says a puzzled Anneke. "I find it a most uplifting colour, full of joy. The Buddhists consider it the colour of the gateway to heaven." David chips in: "...and in music it is the colour of the trumpet". The beds are full of sunflowers, rudbeckias and marigolds, as well as great swathes of dahlias, tulips, amaranthus and everything else you need for cutting. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Worton Organic Garden, Worton, near Cassington, Oxfordshire OX29 4SU. **Tel** 07718 518964.

Website wortonorganicgarden.com

Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday year round.

Yellow is the dominant colour in the flower borders, which in summer are teeming with sunflowers, rudbeckias and marigolds, all of which contrast beautifully with the purple of *Amaranthus* 'Hopi Red Dye'.





Jairo and Fidel from East Timor, and Arnald from the Philippines help David cultivate the seven acres of fruit and vegetables.



1



2



3



4

1 Cut flowers from the borders, such as this mix of zinnias from the Benary's Giant Series, are used for displays in the café. **2 Leeks and other staple** British veg grow alongside exotics from around the world. **3 Amaranthus 'Hopi Red Dye'** adds a dramatic contrast to yellow *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Prairie Sun'. **4 Dahlia 'Otto's Thrill'**, one of Anneke's many dahlias. **5 Borlotti beans** provide a speckled burst of colour. **6 Worton grows many unusual leaves**, including these Salanova lettuces. **7 Solanum melongena 'Black Pearl'**, an aubergine that is well suited to the British climate. **8 Known as Cucurbita maxima 'Atlantic Giant'**, this pumpkin is in fact modest in size.

Top tomatoes

Worton grows amazing tomatoes. David has what he calls 'sweet boxes' on his counter – these are punnets of many-coloured and multi-flavoured, cherry-sized tomatoes. They are completely irresistible and they seldom last long in my house: I even have one on my desk. However, there are chunkier cultivars as well – this is a quick whisk through some of Worton's favourites.

- **'Burke's Backyard'** An Australian heritage tomato that David was initially reluctant to grow, but it has proved to be good.
- **'Caro Rich'** This tomato has a hard skin, which protects it from cracking. The flavour is similar to 'Melody' and it has very few seeds.
- **'Green Doctors'** A cherry-sized tomato, growing in amazingly bountiful trusses. Looks unripe, tastes divine.
- **'Green Giant'** Large with a deep, rich colour. Great sprinkled with either salt or sugar in a tomato salad.
- **'Indigo Beauty'** One of the new-wave American cultivars bred in Minnesota. Sweet with a dark, blue-black skin colour.
- **'Orange Banana'** Very resistant to pests. Long trusses of extremely sweet fruit, good for drying.
- **'Stupice'** A small-to-medium-sized early tomato. Great in a salad – old-fashioned, 'pure tomato' taste. Originated in the Czech Republic.
- **'Sungold'** Gleaming yellow. Sweet and yet sharp at the same time. Really good for indoctrinating children into the joys of tomato eating.
- For information on when to sow and harvest crops see page 104.





L'arte di mangiar bene, or the art of eating well, perfectly sums up David and Anneke's philosophy. It's also the motto of their shop, which you reach by cutting through Anneke's deep borders with *Rudbeckia laciniata* 'Herbstsonne' and *Molinia caerulea* subsp. *arundinacea* 'Transparent' lining your path.



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One of Anneke's displays featuring several cut flowers, including the dark-red *Dahlia* 'Karma Naomi', the peach-coloured *D.* 'Cornel Brons' and the claret-red *D.* 'Ivanetti'.

Tried and tasted

The Real Seed Catalogue offers an extraordinary selection of heritage varieties for kitchen gardeners

WORDS TOM PETHERICK PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

When I arrive at the home of Real Seeds in Newport, Pembrokeshire, boxes of vegetables and bits of drying plant matter are stacked everywhere. I am hardly through the door before Ben Gabel arrives with an armful of shaggy parasol mushrooms, intended for dinner, while his partner Kate McEvoy launches into a discussion of chenopods. We move on to the virtues of obscure grains such as quinoa, *Chenopodium quinoa*, Aztec broccoli *C. berlandieri*, and the amaranths.

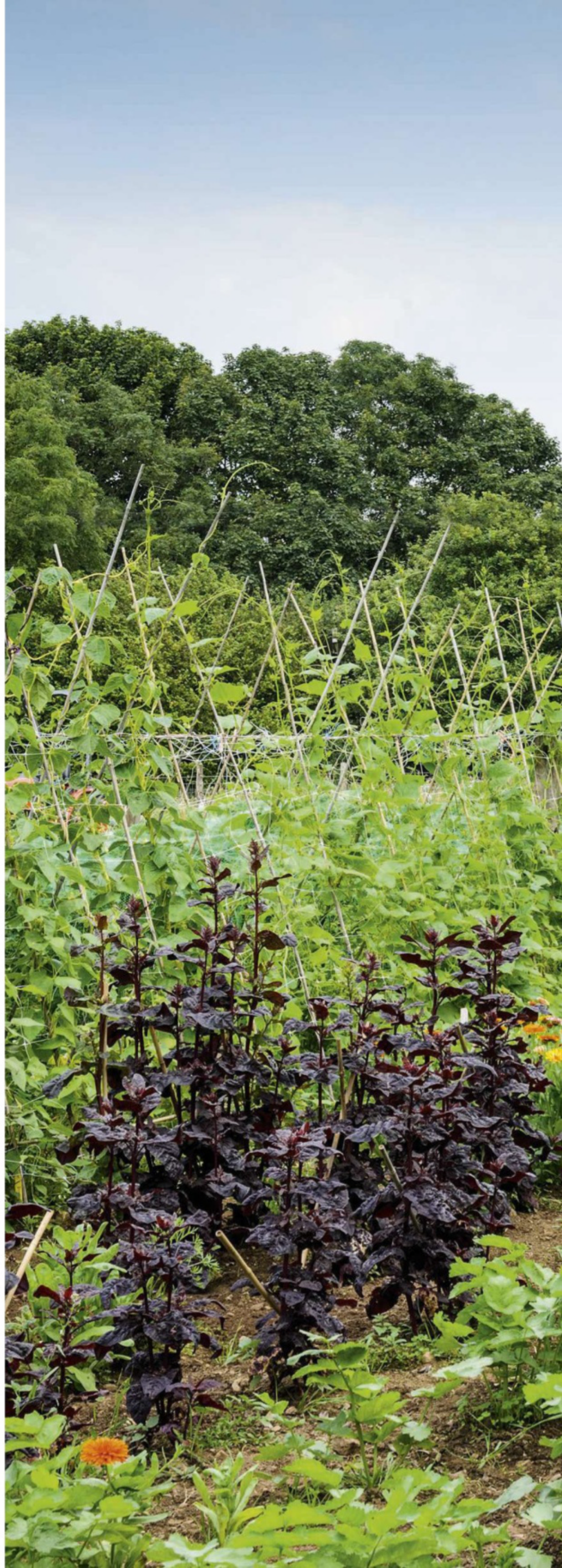
It is clear early on that this place is about more than seeds. Ben and Kate have strong views on food production, the scourge of hybrid seeds, energy production and how to run a company – their own is a balanced partnership between the owners, the staff and the customers. Their mission has been distilled to finding and supplying seeds of the best vegetable varieties for home gardeners who are growing organically, and to teach them how to save seed at home. There are definitely no hybrids here. Everything comes from open-pollinated seeds, which for people like me who believe in co-creating with nature, is a sure sign that Ben and Kate are authentic.

The two could not be clearer about their purpose and the method behind it. The front of the catalogue declares openly that the customer's time will not be wasted with descriptions of varieties that are not to Ben and Kate's liking. They have grown and tasted almost everything themselves and as such offer only what they know is good in terms of taste, ease of growing and also seed saving.

By the time we are ready to travel the short distance from the house to the land where the growing is done, I am ►

Why gardeners should save their own seed

Ben and Kate are both passionate about encouraging gardeners to save their own seed, and are adamant that home seed saving benefits everyone. The primary reason is because you have control over the process, so you know what you are getting. You know the parent plants and you are able to select according to your own requirements – be they taste, size, colour or simply instinct. In a natural system such as this, F1 hybrids appear overbred and artificial, and have no place.





Ben and Kate's large vegetable plot includes climbing beans, peas, tubers, salad crops and edible flowers.

‘Sutherland’ kale is proven to withstand attack from aphids, cabbage white caterpillars, ravenous goats and 70mph freezing sleet

▷ further taken with the ethos behind the project. We have discussed the ‘huge influence’ of Joy Larkcom, talked of *genius loci* and how this sense of place has such an effect on plant growth, and also of the importance of talking to gardeners about their experiences and their favourite varieties. Ben points out that historically, home seed saving has made plant breeders out of all gardeners. The backbone of the work of Real Seeds is to continue to improve those varieties.

Vital as these things are, the quality of the product is what matters to the customer. Increasing demand has led to the construction of a multi-span polytunnel and a barn for drying and processing. Small wonder, because beyond the rabbit-proof fence on the growing fields lie row upon row of vegetables. There are climbing beans, peas, tubers of all description, salad crops and edible flowers, all beloved of the growers and their clients. Most are unusual and some an acquired taste, but that is the nature of the game, especially with plants that gardeners might be coming across for the first time.

Typical in this department is ‘Fat Baby’ achocha (*Cyclanthera pedata*). Listed in the ‘Unusual Cucumber-Relatives’ section of the catalogue, it looked to me for a moment like the chou-chou plant that is commonly found all over Asia. It is in fact a South American vine that produces mini cucumber-like fruits that are excellent raw when young and even better when fried. They have a sweet taste just like green pepper. The curious little oxalis foliage of oca (*Oxalis tuberosa*) is also noticeable, as are the massive, spade-shaped leaves of yacón (*Smallanthus sonchifolius*), the second of the two South American tuber stalwarts.

And then there are ordinary honest-to-goodness vegetables, similarly trialled and selected for garden worthiness and taste. One such example is the ‘Sutherland’ kale, proven to withstand attack from ‘aphids, cabbage white caterpillars, ravenous goats and 70mph freezing sleet’, most of which it would have encountered in its crofting homeland in northern Scotland.

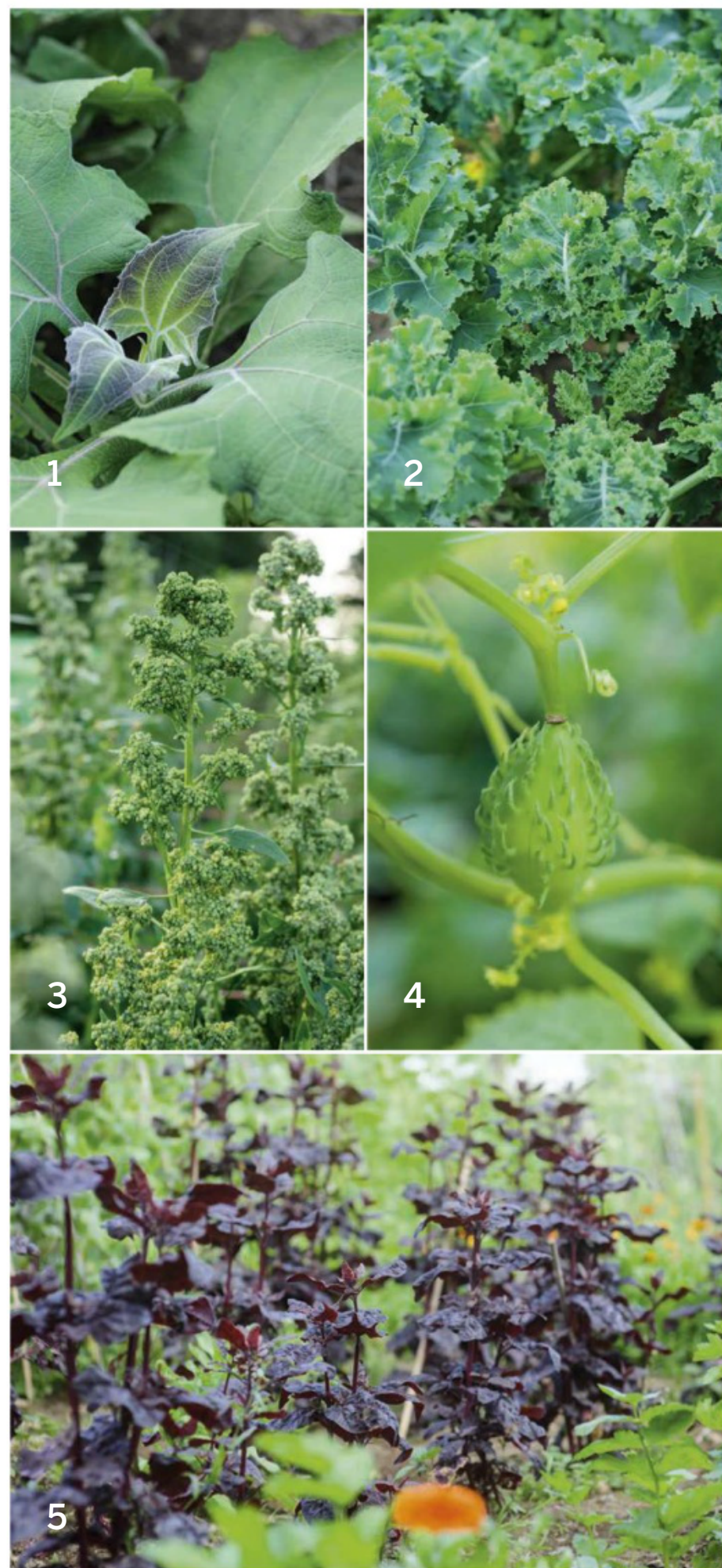
Whatever your fancy, as either grower or cook, it is the declared intention of Real Seeds to help you out. The seed packets give extended cultivation notes backed up by cooking instructions, while the website is crystal clear on techniques for saving seed of all the different plant groups. That Ben and Kate bring such energy to their work is of inestimable value to the gardening community. It will surely stand Real Seeds in good stead for many years to come. □

• For information on when to sow and harvest vegetable crops see page 104.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Address The Real Seed Catalogue, PO Box 18, Newport, nr Fishguard, Pembrokeshire SA65 0AA.

Tel 01239 821107. **Website** realseeds.co.uk



Vegetables to try

1 Yacón A reasonably drought-tolerant plant, so watering is only required in very dry conditions through August and September.

2 ‘Sutherland’ kale A cultivar from the north of Scotland that can withstand most of the problems that normally trouble brassicas.

3 Quinoa This high-protein grain plant from South America is easy to grow and is therefore becoming popular with gardeners. The cultivar ‘Rainbow’ has been specifically bred for the home market and grows good seed even in damper climates.

4 ‘Fat Baby’ achocha Although this is a cucumber relative, it is delicious raw or cooked, highly productive and easy to grow.

5 Red orach An underrated salad plant that is delicious raw or cooked. Red varieties brighten up the garden through the summer and autumn.



This image A scythe works well in Ben's style of mixed plantings. Below Kate checks marigold seeds as they ripen.



Saving tomato seed

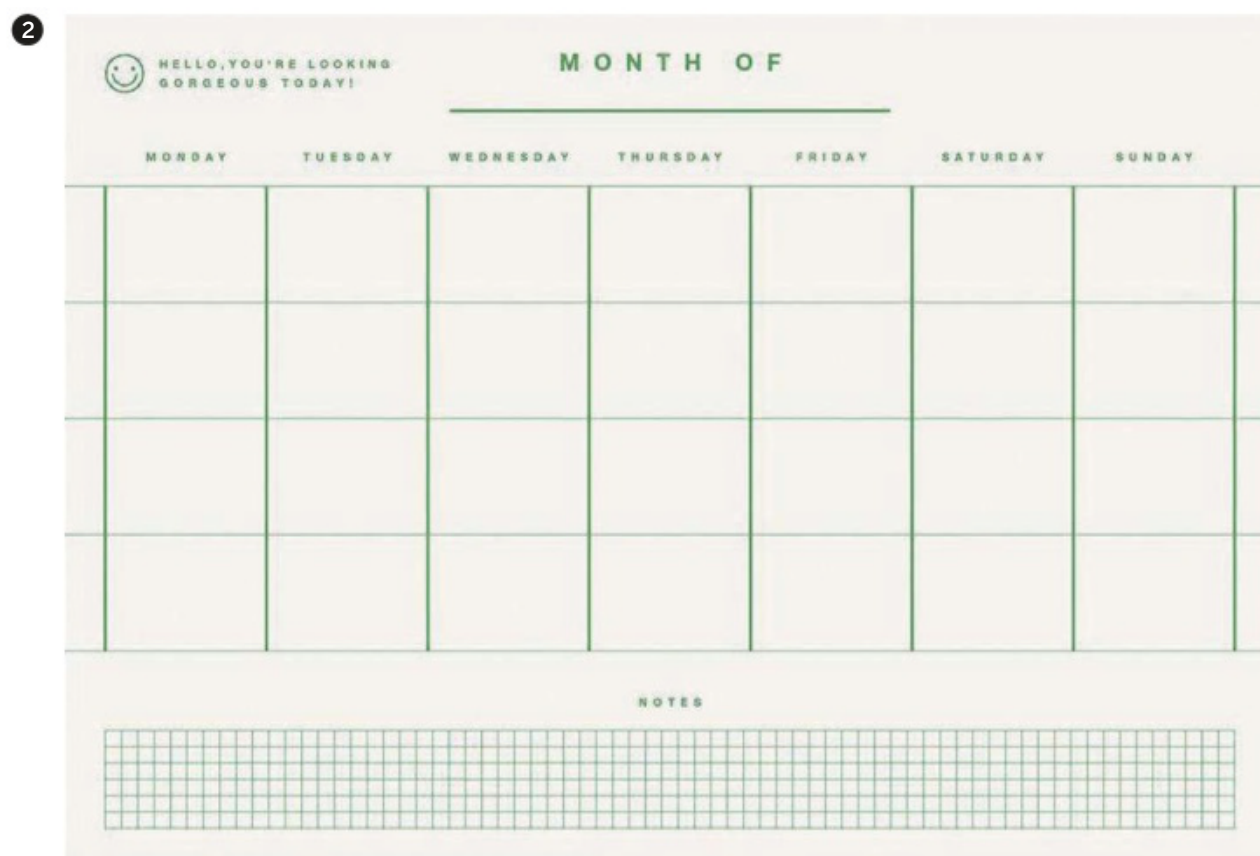
Let the tomatoes reach full ripeness before harvesting (1). Most varieties will not cross-pollinate. When your tomatoes are ready, squeeze the seeds into a jam jar (2) and leave it in a warm room to ferment for three days. Add water to the jar and mix well (3). The good seeds will sink to the bottom. Discard the floating seeds and rinse the good seeds in a sieve under the cold tap (4). Shake off as much water as possible (5) before tipping the seeds on to a china plate (6). Leave to dry in the warm but out of direct sunlight. When fully dry, separate them from each other and store in a cool dry place.

PLANTING OUT

Get a head start on growing your own, with our choice of the best kit for tending your edible garden

1





1. Water Butt, galvanised steel, H107cm x 45cm diameter, £200, and 5-litre Watering Can, greengage, £30, 01993 845559, both gardentrading.co.uk 2. Red Fries Monthly Planner A4, mono green, £10.50, trouva.com 3. 3-Bay Window Sill Propagator with Capillary Mat and Tray, £14.95, earlygrow.co.uk 4. Squirrel-proof Wire Cloches, £19.99 (small), £28.99 (large), 01344 578111, crocus.co.uk 5. Bamboo Seed Tray, £2.73, 01455 393000, littlefieldsfarm.com 6. Vigoroot Easy Table Garden, £57.49, 0117 934 1799, haxnicks.co.uk 7. Coir Jiffy Pellet Tray Sets, £9.95 (one tray with 60 pellets), 0345 092 0283, sarahraven.com 8. Hori Hori Knife with Canvas Sheath, £24, 01747 445059, niwaki.com 9. Traditional Apple Storage Rack, 7 drawers, H91cm x W58.5cm x D53cm, £89.99, 0118 903 5210, primrose.co.uk 10. Vegetable Harvesting Knife, £12.95, 0345 605 2505, worm.co.uk 11. Bulldog Garden Riddle, £24.80, 0800 096 0937, manufactum.co.uk



1. Cotton Duck Apron, black or brown, £44 each, 01223 790199, carhartt.com 2. Multi Seed Tray Dibber, £20.60, stuffedbox.co.uk 3. Double Steamed Wicker Trug, £20 (small), £25 (large), 01202 422600, thebasketcompany.com 4. Latchmere Raised Cold Frame, £140, 01993 845559, gardentrading.co.uk 5. Iris Hantverk Vegetable Scrubbing Brush, £10, 01394 276189, teaandkate.co.uk 6. Bird Netting, from £18.75 for 5m, 0333 400 1500, harrodhorticultural.com 7. Bamboo Plant Support, £3.90 (60cm), bloomingling.uk 8. Slate Plant Tags with Soapstone Pencil, £12 (set of 6), 01993 845559, gardentrading.co.uk 9. Tucana Herb Sickle, £74, 024 7639 2497, implementations.co.uk 10. Pine Wood Potato Rack, £114, 0800 096 0937, manufactum.co.uk 11. Hydra Hoe, £104, 024 7639 2497, implementations.co.uk 12. Potting Bench, teak, H124cm x W125cm x D66cm, £1,925, 01273 486400, garpa.co.uk

12



Potager perfection

On a grand estate in Belgium is a magnificent walled kitchen garden, which remains true to its 18th-century origins yet embraces the best of modern sustainable practices

WORDS LOUISE ALLEN PHOTOGRAPHS JASON INGRAM

IN BRIEF

Name Kasteel Hex.

What 18th-century house with extensive formal gardens and a walled kitchen garden.

Where Heers-Heks, Belgium.

Size 148 acres, including a four-acre walled kitchen garden.

Soil Heavy soil.

Climate Mild winters and moderate summer temperatures. Walled garden does produce a warmer microclimate.

Hardiness rating USDA 8b.



Looking out across the long, wide rows of fruit, vegetables and flowers in the kitchen garden, the view takes in the church and the village of Heers-Heks.

There is a buzz in the air when we arrive at Hex. Estate workers meet and greet gardeners from across northern Europe as they park their cars in the cherry orchard, and there is a palpable sense of excitement. The reason is the twice-yearly plant fair, the only time the garden is open to the public.

As you head up the drive, you catch your first sight of Kasteel Hex. The 18th-century house looks out on the parterre garden that was redesigned in the 1990s by renowned Belgian landscape designer, Jacques Wirtz. Tightly clipped yew hedges and carefully trained roses combine beautifully with the crisp, clean lines of the house. On the far side of the drive, Welsh black sheep and Aberdeen Angus cattle graze, while the odd chicken scratches around your feet. It is this blend of the formal and informal that makes Hex utterly enchanting.

The majority of visitors begin by exploring the fair that is arranged along the allée and in the courtyard and stables around the house, but as you turn away from the plant stands you are led towards the French gardens at the rear of the house. A pair of gardeners' lodges nestle at one end, against a backdrop of deep-purple

beech. A pretty wrought iron gate and an intricate arch clad in roses draw the eye onwards, the roses growing either side along a baroque balustrade. Already you sense that there is so much more to Hex, and as you push open the gate you look down on the kitchen garden with the village of Heers-Heks beyond. Descend the steps and prepare to experience a kitchen garden on a magnificent scale.

The kitchen garden is at the heart of family life for Count and Countess Ghislain d'Ursel and their three children. The Count describes it as the core of the house and garden, providing all the fresh produce and flowers for the family. Everyone who works on the estate is also welcome to harvest from the garden, and everyone has their favourite crop. Throughout the summer the family gravitates to the kitchen garden, which is also home to a swimming pool, tennis court and dining area.

The kitchen garden is beautiful, yet utilitarian. It is gardening for volume, the layout hardly differing from the original 18th-century garden, with some of those techniques still in use today. The central level is dominated by long, wide rows of vegetables that sit next to currants and raspberries and bold, colourful dahlias; this mix of fruit, flowers and vegetables ▶

Sustainable practices

It is easy to look at the kitchen garden at Hex and feel that you have stepped back in time, but many of the techniques are based on relatively recent introductions that are aiming to make the kitchen garden more sustainable.

- A 'bee hotel' of hollow stems and deadwood mimicking favourable nesting sites for various bee species is located above the kitchen garden and is surrounded by a small wildflower meadow. This is in addition to the estate beehives.
- A no-dig policy has been adopted and is adhered to as much as possible.
- All of the beds in the kitchen garden are mulched in the winter with a thick layer of compost produced in the garden.
- Watering is kept to a minimum in the kitchen garden, with spot watering being limited to newly planted plants.
- The gardeners make liquid feed, which is applied to encourage strong plants.

1 The glasshouse on the right of the garden is used for sowing vegetables and flowers, and also houses scented pelargoniums.

2 The gardeners harvest vegetables each day and deliver them to the kitchen in wicker harvesting baskets.

3 An old garden roller sits alongside a bundle of stakes that are awaiting use in the kitchen garden.

4 Welsh black sheep graze the land in front of the drive and the parterre at Kasteel Hex. Mature trees dot the pasture.

5 Bold, bright flowers are grown for cutting for the house, and are nestled in among rows of vegetables and herbs.

6 Long, wide rows of vegetables are a key feature of the garden, along with the 18th-century wall and the vegetable cellars.



It is gardening for volume, the layout
hardly differing from the original
18th-century kitchen garden



The coming together of ideas has led to a new way of gardening at Hex

▷ is repeated throughout. Years of careful training is evident among the fruit trees and throughout the orchard plantings. Perhaps the most impressive tree is a grand old mulberry, propped and heavily laden with fruit. On a lower level is a narrow orchard where sheep graze beside the covered well.

The 250m-long kitchen garden is looked after by just two gardeners. Gust is younger and brings his knowledge and passion for organic, ecological gardening, while Justin lends his experience of the historic fruit and vegetable varieties that have been grown for generations. The coming together of ideas has led to a new way of gardening at Hex, and many of the sustainable approaches are now being applied to the wider estate.

At the far end of the kitchen garden sits a long propagation house, a run of cold frames for hardening off young plants and a conservatory for growing figs. The original frost-free vegetable cellar still exists; at the end of October it comes into use to store the harvest through the winter, including parsnips, celery, kale, pumpkins and endive.

Just beyond the kitchen garden is a bee garden, home to the estate's beehives, and above that is a small wildflower meadow. Once again you are experiencing Hex at its very best – the juxtaposition of formal and informal, and the desire to be ecological but also seriously productive. It celebrates the very best of gardening, and is incredibly charming and truly beautiful. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Kasteel Hex,
B-3870 Heers-Heks, Belgium.

Tel +32 (0)12 74 73 41. **Website** hex.be

Open Hex Garden Festivals take place in June and September. See website for details.





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Hex's highlights

1 Many of the recent approaches to make the garden more sustainable have been introduced by gardener Gust Duchamps.

2 *Beta vulgaris* 'Detroit' was introduced more than a century ago and produces a deep-red beetroot with good flavour.

3 *Brassica oleracea* 'Redbor' is grown here in one of the ornamental borders because it is a particularly attractive kale cultivar with a pleasant, mild taste. AGM*.

4 The dahlias at Hex are all old cultivars that came from Vrijbroekpark, a garden near Antwerp. Names have long since been lost but this small-flowered decorative dahlia is similar in appearance to 'Foxy Lady'.

5 *Brassica oleracea* (Gongylodes Group) 'Violetta' is an easy to grow kohlrabi that matures quickly but remains quite sweet and tender.

6 This peony-flowered dahlia has dark leaves and looks similar to 'Bishop of Llandaff', or 'Olympic Fire'.

7 *Daucus carota* 'Scarlet Nantes Half Long' is a carrot that has been selected not just for its sweet flavour but because it keeps very well too.

8 A wide range of brassicas is grown in the kitchen garden at Hex. This white cabbage is called 'Langedijk Bewaar'.

9 This charming pompom dahlia has purple-pink petals tipped in white and could well be the cultivar 'Edinburgh'.

10 Celeriac needs a rich soil to thrive. At Hex the addition of home-made compost encourages good growth.

11 Gardener Justin's extensive knowledge of the historic fruit cultivars at Hex comes from years of experience.

12 A single-flowered dahlia with ribbon-like petals in tones of pink and yellow. This one is possibly 'Bright Eyes'.

• For information on when to sow and harvest vegetable crops see page 104.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.

Great Dixter delicacies

Expert advice and favoured cultivars from Great Dixter's famed kitchen garden at the peak of the growing season

WORDS JODIE JONES PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



Aaron Bertelsen at work in the kitchen garden at Great Dixter. Here visitors often stop and chat to him and offer advice. "If you want to know how to grow vegetables," he says, "talk to an old man from the north of England. They have years more experience than me, and I'll often learn something new from talking to them."

Seeds of plenty

Aaron sources his seed from a variety of different companies although many come from Thompson & Morgan (0333 400 0033, thompson-morgan.com) and Moles Seeds in Essex (01206 213213, molesseeds.co.uk). He also uses seeds from several US seed companies including the Territorial Seed Company (territorialseed.com) and Johnny's Seeds (johnnyseeds.com). To keep track of where the seed has come from, he writes everything in a notebook. "Then when it is time for my next order, it is easy to look back and check."

- Find more recommended seed suppliers on page 106.



Vegetable mainstays

Here are some of the cultivars grown by Christopher Lloyd and still favoured by Aaron.

We have always grown a lot of fruit and vegetables in the garden,' wrote Christopher Lloyd. 'What could be more natural than to want to use them effectively in the kitchen?' When Christopher's parents, Nathaniel and Daisy Lloyd, bought Great Dixter in 1910, growing your own food (or having it grown for you), was the norm for anyone with access to an appropriate plot of land. But in the latter part of the 20th century, after the hardships of the Second World War and the need to 'dig for victory', many people gratefully downed tools and started to go to the supermarket instead.

At Dixter, however, the same ground has continually served the same kitchen, and even the same fridge (bought in 1942). Today the kitchen garden is maintained by New Zealander Aaron Bertelsen. He has been associated with Dixter for 24 years, and has had sole charge of fruit and vegetable production since 2010.

"It is a fantastic privilege, living and working at Dixter. It becomes your whole world," says Aaron. "Christo grew veg here for so long that he amassed an amazing depth of knowledge. My job is to build on what he did and now, as then, the first priority is to grow only what we actually want to use in the house.

"Christo was very firm about that. He wanted to get maximum mileage out of the garden. That is why we don't have an asparagus bed. He thought it was a waste to devote so much ground to one crop that was soon over. He preferred to grow artichokes, which crop over a much longer season, and buy asparagus from a pick-your-own place just down the road. Which is exactly what I do today." In fact, in most things Aaron is happy to follow in Christopher's footsteps. "I have his own copy of *Gardener Cook*, complete with his pencil markings, and that is my bible for what to grow and how to grow it."

Aaron does trial new cultivars, but he's generally happy to stick with old favourites. He allows himself the odd whimsy, such as the cloud of 'Cedric Morris' poppies that foam around the gooseberry bushes in early summer. Like Christopher before him, Aaron follows a standard crop-rotation system. He doesn't use green manures ("I'd rather grow something I can eat!"), but incorporates plenty of three-year-old compost, thoroughly digging the whole plot every winter. "You need a soil that roots find it easy to grow into," he says. All seed is sown in plugs, using a home-made John Innes No.2 compost, then grown on in "Mrs Next-door's heated glasshouse" (borrowed by arrangement) and only planted out when sturdy plants have formed.

Brassicas are protected from marauding pigeons by fine, black threads strung between canes to form a near-invisible barrier. Soft fruit is grown in a large cage. "Visitors always ask about slug control, but we have so many birds here that numbers never become a problem." His final rule is to water thoroughly but infrequently. "Once a fortnight I run the sprinkler for an hour at a time on each quarter of the vegetable garden. People underestimate how much water vegetables need." Even so, there are certain crops he has learned are not worth growing. "Christo always said onions were cheap to buy and prone to disease so why bother? And after a few attempts I have given up growing sweetcorn, because the badgers always trample it and eat every cob just before you plan to harvest them." But as the constituents of a good meal have changed little in the past 100 years, so the range of crops grown at Dixter has remained consistent. The guiding passions for Aaron remain, as Christopher wrote in *Gardener Cook*: 'growing plants, eating their products and the social opportunities that cookery opens up'. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Read Aaron's monthly column on growing fruit and vegetables in *Gardens Illustrated*.

Tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*) 'Black Cherry', 'Super Marmalade', 'Alicante' and 'Gardeners' Delight' (which Christopher believed was 'a must'). These are underplanted with basil, to help keep off whitefly. "I usually grow green basil, but recently I've tried 'Red Rubin' basil from Seeds of Change," says Aaron.

Globe artichokes (*Cynara cardunculus* Scolymus Group) Christopher recalled it was his mother who first brought artichokes to Dixter (when they were a rarity in this country), 'but when she developed a taste for them, I do not know'. Aaron still grows Christopher's favourites – 'Gros Camus de Bretagne' and 'Gros Vert de Laon'. Aaron grows four rows, of which he replaces two rows every year (only cropping plants for two years in total).

French beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*)

Aaron grows several cultivars, in particular 'Cobra', which crops over a long season and freezes well.

Brassicas This family has always been a mainstay of the Dixter vegetable garden. Over the years Aaron has tried several cultivars, including F1 hybrids: cabbage 'Rodima'; borecole 'Redbor'; cauliflowers 'Pavilion', 'Romanesco Veronica' and 'Green Harmony'; and kales 'Scarlet', 'Nero di Toscana' and 'Nero di Toscana Precoce'.

Peas (*Pisum sativum*) 'Here is a vegetable which you simply must grow yourself, as there is no adequate substitute,' wrote Christopher. He favoured 'Hurst Green Shaft', and so does Aaron.

Potatoes (*Solanum tuberosum*) "We don't aim for self-sufficiency, but every March to April, I plant 'Charlotte' (for boiling) and 'Pink Fir Apple' (which stores very well and tastes great)." Both were also favourites of Christopher. Aaron also grows 'Picasso'. "In an informal trial a few years ago this was easily everyone's favourite for baking."

Leeks (*Allium ampeloprasum* Porrum Group) Christopher wrote that he felt 'deprived if we are short of leeks. I don't want to touch one 'til November, but I expect them to last me into April'. His preferred cultivar was 'Cortina'. Aaron grows 'Lyon 2 Prizetaker' and 'Musselburgh'.

Broad beans (*Vicia faba*) Christopher grew 'Express' and also dwarf bean 'The Sutton'. Aaron still grows 'Express'.

• For more information on when to sow and harvest vegetable crops see page 104.



EATING OUT

Enjoy the fruits of your labours on long summer evenings with these stylish furniture and accessory ideas for al fresco dining





1. Nassau Table and Chairs Set, £199, LifestyleGarden, lifestylegarden.com 2. Palm Leaf Outdoor Rug, £69, Lime Lace, 0330 058 4158, limelace.co.uk
3. Multicolour Fishbone Rug, £40, National Trust, 0344 800 1895, shop.nationaltrust.org.uk 4. Drake Cane Lantern, £15, Habitat, 0344 499 4686, habitat.co.uk
5. Balad Lamp, £75, and Balad Spike Stand, £65, Fermob, fermob.com/en 6. Penny Rattan Placemats, £26 each, Anthropologie, 00800 0026 8476, anthropologie.com 7. Fiskardo Tray in Lemon, £26, Garden Trading, 01993 845559, gardentrading.co.uk 8. Sowden Bottles, £29 each, WallpaperSTORE*, store.wallpaper.com/en 9. Rolio Acacia Table, £350, and Rolio Acacia Bench, £195, The Rich Brothers + Habitat, 0344 499 4686, habitat.co.uk
10. Embroidered Vegetable Napkins, set of 6, £60, OKA, 0333 004 2042, oka.com 11. The Chili Red Oven, £1,200, Delivita, 01484 608989, delivita.co.uk
12. Leksand Table Runner, £24, Nordic Nest, 020 3002 1196, nordicnest.com



Autumn

**It's time to dust off
your jam recipes as
fruit crops ripen –
and look to savour
other late harvests –
as well as digging out
your compost and
tidying up your plot**

AUTUMN NOTES

To ensure a good crop of future gardeners, first take one school garden, and cultivate it diligently (with the help of some enthusiastic children and a couple of parents)

WORDS JOJO TULLOH ILLUSTRATIONS SARAH YOUNG

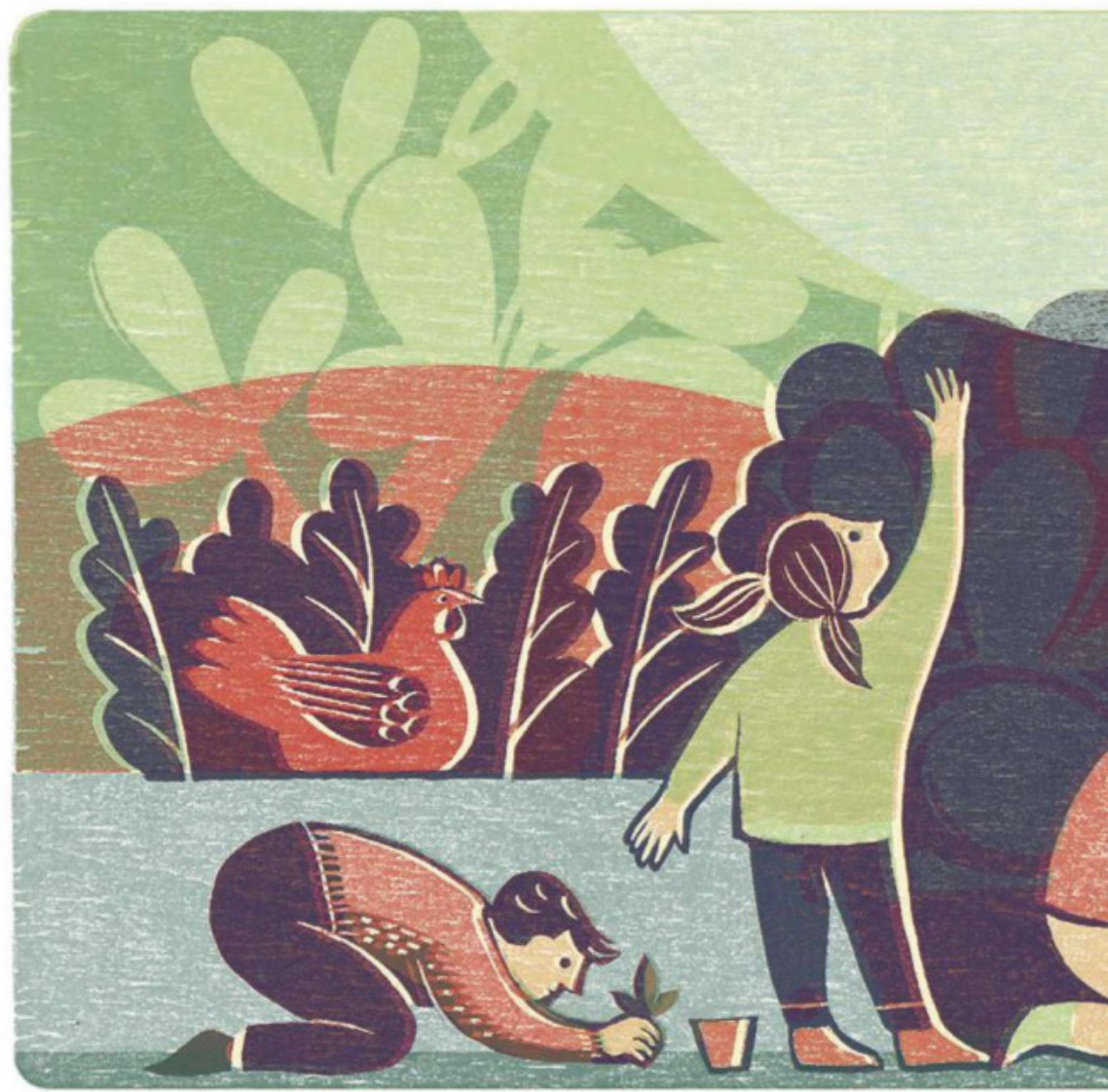
September

In the garden

The third garden in my life (aside from my allotment and the one attached to our house) is the one I am most proud of: the garden in the playground of our local primary school in Hackney, east London. It is worked by me and another mother, the children in our after-school gardening club and, most significantly, by our school gardener who comes in one day a week to maintain the garden (beautifully) and also teach the children about all things ecological. The beauty and fruitfulness of the garden is down to him (we mostly mess it up), but the teaching part is key. In these times of swingeing cuts, school gardens will only survive if they offer educational value for money.

As well as 11 raised beds, in which we grow a variety of edibles and flowers, we have a small orchard. It has six heritage apple trees, two plum trees and a strip of native hedgerow plants including medlars, hazel and rowan trees and, rather randomly, two blackcurrant bushes. Four chickens, hatched out at school, scratch in a run beside the trees. The orchard offers children a quiet space and a little bit of the natural world in a playground surrounded by high-density housing. It has not yet cropped much (last year the blossom and tiny fruits were too tempting for tiny fingers). Plenty comes in the form of an enormous, 25m-high cooking apple tree, a legacy of Hackney's market-garden past. The problem is how to get the apples down.

The Yorkshire vicar William Lawson (1553-1635) wrote two of the 17th century's best-known books on gardening, *The Country Housewife's Garden* and *A New Orchard and Garden*. In the latter he gives detailed instruction on how to run an orchard and describes various useful apparatus for picking: 'A gathering apron like a poak before you, made of a purpose, or a wallet hung on a bough, or a basket with a sieve bottom, or skin bottome, with lathes or splinters



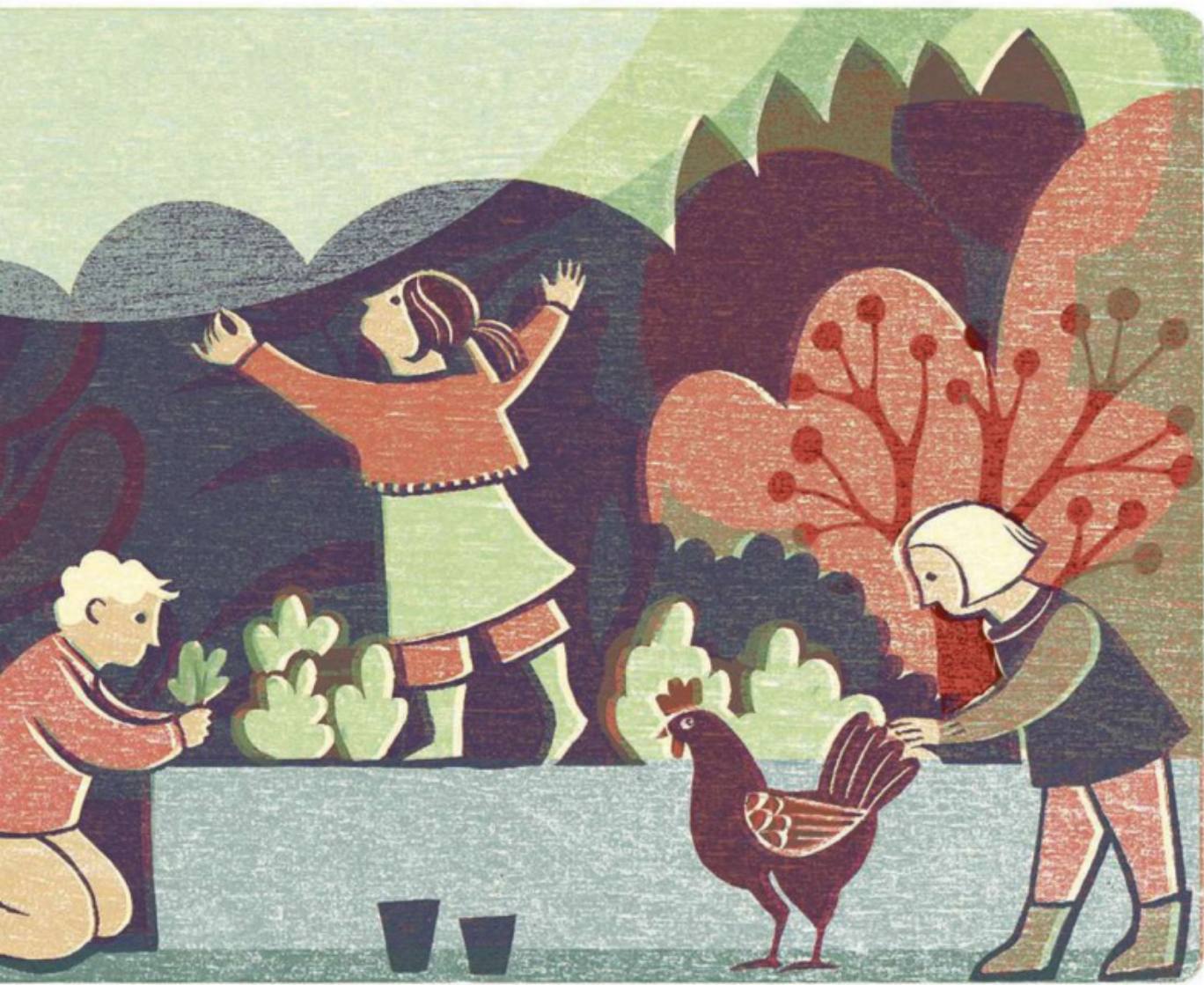
under, hung in a rope to pull up and down.' I found some great modern versions in the USA (available from durokon.com) – padded nylon bucket bags that strap to your back. The most helpful tool available here seems to be the Wolf Fruit Picker, a net bag with a scalloped plastic edge that you can attach to a telescopic handle.

Lawson's advice on picking for storing is: 'Gather your fruit when it is ripe, and not before, else will it wither, and be tough and sower. All fruits generally are ripe when they begin to fall.' Aside from looking out for unblemished fruit dropping, you can also cup the apple and twist gently to see if it will disengage. Try to get them all down by the end of October when high winds and frosts threaten.

In the kitchen

'I should sugar and preserve my days like fruit,' wrote Sylvia Plath in her poem *Last Words*. It's a good motto for this time of year when both hedgerow and garden plot are equally full to bursting with fruits that need to be transformed into something longer lasting. We grow the medlar (*Mespilus germanica*) in our school orchard. It is an unusual fruit, small and round, ripening to a glossy russet colour with a central rough 'eye' framed by five sepals. The jelly made from this fruit is sharp and would go well with game or smoked fish. To be eaten raw, the fruit must be bletted (in an overripe condition), but the jelly requires only that you cut the fruit into four, barely cover with water and then stew until soft. Put the fruit in a jelly bag and allow to drip overnight before boiling up at the ratio of 500g sugar to 600ml juice until the setting point is reached, and then seal in sterilised jars.

If you haven't grown the complex parsley and celery-ish tasting herb lovage (*Levisticum officinale*), then do sow some now (it needs cold to trigger germination). If you do have it, consider making a herb salt for winter use. Use it in soups or to add a verdant note to



The medlar is an unusual fruit, small and round, ripening to a glossy russet colour with a central rough 'eye' framed by five sepals. The jelly made from this fruit is sharp and goes well with game or smoked fish

winter salads of smoked fish and peppery leaves, or on a Swedish *smørrebrød* (open sandwich) of brown bread, sliced boiled egg and radish. Pick a large bunch of fresh-looking leaves on a warm, dry day and blend with 200g sea salt, push through a sieve to get rid of any fibres and then freeze until required. You can also stick a section of hollow lovage stem in a Bloody Mary and later use the seeds in a flour mix for bread.

Damsons make a very good jelly but you can also make a terrific vodka with them – laid down now it will be ready in time for Christmas. You need 1kg damsons, 500ml of vodka, sugar to taste and a couple of large preserving jars, washed in soapy water and then heated in a warm oven (160°C) for ten minutes to sterilise. Wash the damsons and remove any that are mouldy or damaged. Pack them into the jars, stopping about 6cm from the top, and cover with vodka. Put in a cupboard and give the jar a shake when you remember. Four months later, strain the contents through a jelly bag, wringing it to squeeze out maximum juice. Add the sugar bit by bit, stopping when it tastes good to you. Put the jar back in the cupboard, shaking every other day for at least two weeks. It's ready when the liquid is clear and the sugar has completely dissolved. Strain into sterilised bottles.

If you want your alcoholic hit now, make a purée from cooked and sieved damsons sweetened with sugar, then take a teaspoon of the mixture and put it in the bottom of a glass of sparkling wine, using as you would cassis to make a kir royale.

What to sow

- The heat of the summer (plus your careful turning) should have cooked your compost beautifully. Now is the time to dig it out and spread it over empty beds or store it in rubble sacks for use later on. This will give you plenty of space to start laying down the excess plant matter generated as you clear summer crops of potatoes, beans and pumpkins.
- If you have grown lots of root vegetables (carrots, potatoes, turnips, beetroots and swedes), consider making a clamp to store them. If you have a cool shed, cellar or garage, you can twist off the greens and bury the roots in boxes of sand. A traditional method is to make what looks like a mini long barrow. Lay a bed of straw, pile up the veg in a pyramid, cover with more straw then a layer of earth, and make straw chimneys out of bundles of stalks, left sticking out roughly a metre apart at the top and along the bottom.
- If you're looking for good cold-tolerant winter greens to be eaten raw or cooked, sow a few oriental greens. Real Seeds has many. Three I'm trying are komatsuna (mustard spinach) and mustard greens 'Osaka Purple' and the milder 'Dragon's Tongue'.

What to cook

Three classic plum and almond tarts

Try these if you have lots of plums or pluots (juicy apricot/plum hybrid). The first tart is very rich, and the first two require a shortcrust pastry shell baked blind (**225g pastry** in 20-22cm tart tin).

- Make a rich, stiff almond paste of **200g each of sugar, coarsely ground almonds and butter** whizzed up with **4 egg yolks, 1tbsp lemon zest** and **½ vanilla pod's seeds**. Spoon this into the pastry case, smooth it and then arrange **16-20 plum halves**: place one in the centre cut side up and make two further rings of plums. Bake for 30-45 minutes at 190°C, and cover loosely with foil if browning too fast.
- A less rich version is made with **10-15 plums** halved and placed closer together cut side up in the pastry case before carefully pouring this light almond batter around the fruit. Blend **50g caster sugar, 50g butter, 1 egg**, beaten and **50g ground almonds**. Bake as above for 30 minutes.
- The third – and by far the easiest – is this everyday tart. Roll your pastry out on a tray lined with parchment. Combine **2tbsp sugar, 1tbsp ground almonds** and **1tbsp flour** and spread this mixture on the pastry, leaving a 2cm border. On top of the mixture arrange **500g plums** stoned and cut into crescents. Sprinkle the fruit with **3tbsp sugar**, roll over and crimp the pastry sides, brush them with **melted butter** and sprinkle with sugar, before baking at 180°C for 35 minutes or until the fruit is tender and the pastry a deep golden brown. Allow to cool, then brush with melted jam (optional).

October

In the garden

The standard supermarket onion is a harsh, rank-tasting object when compared to the subtly flavoured kinds we can grow for ourselves. Just like that other staple, the potato, the choice of onions available in seed catalogues makes what's on offer in the shops look rather pathetic. Coloured golden, red, purple, white or green, there are onions to store, onions to eat fresh, salad onions, pickling onions and that oddity the Egyptian or tree onion (*Allium cepa* var. *viviparum*) with its long, wand-like stem topped with a cluster of bulbils or sets where a normal onion would have flowers.

Onions can be grown from seed or sets (immature bulbs about the size of a cherry tomato). For a year-round supply of onions from seed, sow twice, once at the end of the summer and again in the spring. It is cheaper to sow seed, there's more choice and you will grow higher quality bulbs, but it's a more involved process. I get good results by sowing into compost in a small pot and then transplanting the seedlings. It's even easier to plant sets and you can do this right now. There's something very satisfying about popping the bulbs into the earth and I like the pocket of order a square bed of onions grown in diagonal lines gives to my winter garden. As you will be hoeing off weeds as soon as they appear, the onion acts as a cleaning crop.

Onions like an open site and well-drained, fertile soil, but should not be planted in freshly manured ground as they do not require much nitrogen, so dig over and manure your ground a few weeks in advance. Space the sets 10cm apart with 30cm between rows, pushing them into the ground gently with only the papery tip showing. If bulbs are disrupted by worms or pulled out by birds, replant gently and try not to damage the roots. I cover mine with a square of netting held up by vine



twigs. Planting them in soil that previously held brassicas helps with the problem of white rot, a fungal disease that attacks alliums, garlic and leeks. Regular weeding is vital. This is because onions hold their leaves upright, and so do not suppress weeds easily. If left for too long, weeds will overwhelm the crop, causing damaging competition.

In the kitchen

The past can be a rich source of culinary inspiration. In an early treatise on vegetable cookery I came across this proverb: *L'autunno per la bocca et la primavera per l'occhio*, which loosely translates as autumn is for tasting, spring is for looking. The writer acknowledging this season's bounty was Giacomo Castelvetro (1546-1616), a sophisticated literary refugee who fled the clutches of the Roman Inquisition and came to England where, used to an Italian diet of carefully cooked vegetables, he found the meat- and sugar-heavy diet appalling. His book *The Fruit, Herbs and Vegetables of Italy* (1614) describes his idea of luxurious cooking – the very freshest of vegetables cooked without fuss. A linguist and translator, Castelvetro left behind a short but very elegant publication of great clarity.

The book lists fruit and vegetables as they come into season, with simple, elegant ways of preparing them. It's a good read for the kitchen gardener and has many excellent ideas, such as steeping elderflower blossoms in vinegar or adding chopped onion to a purslane salad. Autumn contains some tasty-sounding suggestions for pumpkins – the flesh cut into fingers, floured and fried and served with juice of bitter oranges (Sevilles) or smaller gourds boiled whole and braised in butter. I find it useful to freeze Seville oranges in January and use them as needed. Another interesting recipe uses the tips of pumpkin vines, cut



Drinking vinegars, or shrubs, once popular in colonial America, are a fashionable base for cocktails and tonics. Made from fruit steeped in sugar and vinegar, they are tart and sour and much more appetising than they sound

off to palm-length pieces, tied in bundles and boiled, then dressed with melted butter, salt, pepper and bitter orange juice. *Agliata* also sounds tempting, a mixture of pounded walnuts, garlic and breadcrumbs thinned with stock that can be eaten with pork or used to dress pasta.

Lately there's been a revival of drinking vinegars – called shrubs – as a fashionable base for cocktails and tonics. Adding vinegar to water is a practice that dates back to the Romans, but these kinds of fruit shrub were a popular drink in colonial America. Made from fruit steeped in sugar and vinegar, the name comes from the Arabic for drink – *sharab*. They are tart and sour and much more appetising than they sound.

This recipe is for elderberry shrub but you could also use other fruits, such as damsons, crab apples, quince, redcurrants or blackberries. Take a large, clip-top glass jar and fill with 250g elderberries. Pour over 500ml red wine vinegar. Keep the jar somewhere cool and dark and shake from time to time. After a couple of weeks, strain the liquid into a pan and heat gently, stirring in as much or as little sugar as suits your palate. When the sugar has dissolved bring the liquid up to the boil and boil for two or three minutes. Skim off any scum. Strain the shrub into a bottle and seal with a cork. Use the tart syrup mixed with water, tonic or soda to make a refreshing soft drink or try mixing with white wine, sherry or bitters for a cocktail.

What to sow

- 'Radar', a white bulb streaked with green, with thick green stems that can be chopped and eaten too, is a good onion set for autumn planting. Tamar Organics (tamarorganics.co.uk) offers this fast-maturing, hardy cultivar. Another favourite autumn planting set is 'Senshyu', a hardy, reliable Japanese onion that produces squat, slightly flattened bulbs, pale gold in colour. Thompson & Morgan (thompson-morgan.com).
- Shallots have a sweeter flavour than regular onions – the torpedo-shaped shallot often referred to as a 'banana' shallot is my default cooking allium. I always plant out a net full of 'Echalote Grise', available from The Garlic Farm (thegarlicfarm.co.uk).
- Order seed now for a spring sowing of hardy 'Early Paris White', from Real Seeds, which produces round, bright-white onions with long, green stems. If you planted onion seeds in the last week of August, they should need transplanting out in early October about 15cm apart.
- If you want to grow storing onions, the 'Yellow Rynsburger' is a traditional variety with skin that ages to a deep, russet brown from Real Seeds, which also has the sweet and spicy 'Liria'. Red onions can be less consistent croppers but try 'Amposta' (for storing) and 'Red Brunswick' (to eat fresh), as well as the flavourful 'Long Red Florence' and versatile 'Purplette'.
- Get your plot cleaned up for winter. Remove withered plants and dig over the soil, either planting a green manure, or covering with weed-suppressant fabric. Save up raked leaves for leaf mould.

What to cook

Fermentation, the art of turning raw ingredients into something new by harnessing beneficial bacteria, is ideal for preserving excess. I like to ferment baby root vegetables whole in a light bath of vinegar and salt, or grate vegetables as in sauerkraut.

Sauerruben

This is the turnip version of sauerkraut. Take **1kg turnips** and grate into a bowl. Squeeze them to release the juice and pack into a 1.5-litre clip-top jar, adding **½tbsp sea salt** as you go. Push the matter down so there's 1cm of brine on top. Take a jam jar that will fit inside the clip-top jar, fill with water, put the lid on and use it to weigh the turnips down below the level of the brine. Cover with a piece of kitchen towel tied on with string to keep off insects. Leave for a few days, then taste every now and then. In cold weather the flavour will develop over months (weeks if it's warmer), but you can put it in the fridge to halt the fermentation process when you like the taste.

November

In the garden

I like gardening on the edge of winter. The jobs that need doing are neither too vigorous nor too numerous; instead they are of the pleasing, putting-to-rights kind. Things are slowing down, weeds no longer grow like Topsy and the time-consuming job of watering large sections of the plot by hand no longer needs to be done. Instead there are tools to be cleaned and rubbed with an oily cloth, leaves to be raked and the odd bit of soft fruit pruning to do. I would like to be the kind of person who keeps their shed in perfect order but it is often the case that after I have weeded, watered and picked in too short a time that there is only a moment in which to hurl pell-mell rake, spade, mattock, fork and watering cans back into the shed. So it is that I spend a quiet morning watching starlings wheel in the sky over Leytonstone, creating order where there was only chaos. Chaos will descend again as inevitably as the beginning of spring but setting things straight feels good for now.

Your vegetable garden is a source of food for you but the edges can also provide rich pickings for wildlife. The more complex and diverse your ecosystem the fewer problems you will have with pests attacking your crops. Luring insectivorous birds to your plot is a highly beneficial act and you're off to a good start with a compost heap, which will hold scores of invertebrates such as woodlice, worms, snails, slugs and earwigs. This year I left some chicory to go to seed and the snails tended to congregate there rather than attack my tender seedlings. Leave some wilder, weedy patches too; the odd untidy corner will encourage butterflies, moths, birds and insects; a small patch of nettles, chopped down regularly, will provide soft young plants for many common caterpillars to feed on; bramble, dock and thistle are all rich sources of food. If you're really lucky you may even attract a hedgehog or my dream allotment companion, the toad.



Encourage pollinators by making space for highly scented, nectar-producing plants. Train a honeysuckle over your shed or next year grow sweet rocket, lavender or honesty. Now is the time to clean bird boxes, as the inhabitants will have moved on to winter roosts by now, and in doing this you can remove any lurking parasites. Trees provide a home to a multitude of creatures – consider planting a native tree or a bit of hedgerow, such as hazel, beech, rowan or hawthorn or, if you have space (and time), that most mighty of insect hotels, the oak. I let my sunflowers stand until frost and winds knock them down, as the heads heavy with seed offer food for birds and the hollow stalks stacked up beneath my rosemary bush make a haven for insects.

In the kitchen

Agrodolce is a lovely word. Like a bare-knuckle fighter with a heart of gold, it's a culinary term that means sour and sweet and usually refers to a mixture of sugar and vinegar used either to dress or cook with. In this recipe it's used to transform small pickling onions or shallots into cipolline in *agrodolce*, the onions cooked but still firm and coated in sweet-and-sour syrup. Take 500g unpeeled weight of small onions, top and tail and peel carefully. Heat two tablespoons of olive oil in a deep-sided pan, add a bay leaf and a couple of cloves and then gently brown the onions, taking care not to use too violent a heat. When you're happy with the colour, add two tablespoons of balsamic vinegar and two of white wine vinegar plus one tablespoon of sugar. Cover and cook until tender, keeping a careful eye to see if they are catching (if so add a little water). Allow to cool, cover, refrigerate and eat the next day (they will crisp up a little in the fridge). Eat as an appetiser or with roasted meats.

I'm always looking for new ways to cook chicory: the first here is sour sweet, the second subtly savoury. Pickled radicchio is quick



I let my sunflowers stand until frost and winds knock them down, as the heads heavy with seed offer food for birds and the hollow stalks stacked up beneath my rosemary make a haven for insects

to make as, unlike most pickles, it is ready in hours not weeks. Discard any tired leaves and then separate the rest, tearing the larger ones in half. Make a simple brine by heating 400ml of white wine vinegar, two tablespoons of sea salt and eight tablespoons of sugar. Allow the brine to cool, pour into a bowl and then immerse the leaves (weigh them down with a saucer). Leave to soften for at least two hours, moving them around from time to time. Drain to serve and eat as part of a winter salad with beets or cheese or smoked fish.

For colder days the heads can be griddled and served with an anchovy dressing. The dressing needs to sit and develop so make it first. Crush a decent-sized clove of garlic in a pestle with a pinch of sea salt, remove the paste and reserve with a teaspoon of olive oil. Then, using the same pestle, pound (or chop) six salt-packed anchovy fillets (or a tin of 12 smaller oil-packed fillets) combine with two tablespoons of red wine vinegar and four tablespoons of olive oil, whisk well and leave for an hour. About 15 minutes before you want to eat, remove the outer leaves from the chicory heads and split lengthways. Season the halves on the cut side with sea salt and black pepper and rub in olive oil. Heat a griddle pan or heavy frying pan until smoking hot and cook the halves over a medium heat for five minutes until hot through, then turn over and grill the other side for three minutes or until tender (test with the point of a knife). Arrange on a plate and dress with the anchoiade. ▢

What to sow

- Birds are attracted to water as well as to food and nesting sites. There's still time to make a pond, especially a miniature one like mine. I found a five-litre plastic paint pot in the rubbish piled up at our site's gate and sank it in the ground, leaving a branch for wildlife to climb out on. An upturned dustbin lid makes a good birdbath too. Having provided for others, protect your own by netting cabbages against pigeons and pulling a mini fleece tunnel over oriental salads, spinach and chicory.
- Harvesting vegetables on squally wintery days is not a pleasurable task so make life simple by arranging your winter plot so you can see what is available. If you suffer hard frosts, consider digging some of your leeks in advance; it's impossible to pull them when it's icy but replanting them horizontally just under the soil will make them easy to get at. Mark your line of parsnips with a stick as it's hard to find them when the foliage withers or the ground is covered in snow.
- Think ahead and procure some manure to rot down over winter. Onions don't like disturbed ground so set aside a space for an onion bed and dig it over so it has time to settle before spring.

What to cook

Apple and tamarind chutney

Make home-made pickle now and it will be ready to eat at Christmas. The sweet apple benefits from the tang of the tamarind, the sour pulp extracted from the bean of the tamarind tree. Take **1tbsp of dried pickling spices** (a mix of mustard seeds, dried chillies, cloves, peppercorns, allspice, cinnamon, coriander), **450g onions**, finely chopped, **300ml white vinegar**, **900g cooking apples** (weight when peeled and cored), **5cm lump dried tamarind**, **350g soft light brown sugar**, **1 walnut-sized piece of ginger**, peeled and finely grated, **6 fresh red chillies**, deseeded and thinly sliced, **1tsp mustard seeds**, **100g raisins**, **sea salt and pepper**. Makes approx five medium (**350ml**) jars. Put the pickling spices in a small square of fabric and tie up. Soak the tamarind in a cup of boiling water. Gently simmer the onions with half the vinegar in a large stainless steel saucepan for 10 minutes. Peel, core and chop the apples into 2cm cubes and add to the pan with the rest of the vinegar, the spices, raisins, sugar, ginger, chillies, mustard seeds, a little sea salt and pepper. Stir until the sugar is dissolved. Rub the softened tamarind through a sieve with a wooden spoon straight into the pan. Stir well. Cook for about 45 minutes at a gentle simmer, stirring occasionally to get a thick, jam-like texture. Remove from the heat and spoon into hot sterilised jars. Cover with waxed paper discs, seal and store in a dark cupboard for at least a month.

Apples for life

Gravetye Manor in West Sussex is renowned for its glorious gardens, but in a wild orchard on the edge of the garden, head gardener Tom Coward is reintroducing a taste of the garden's fruitful past

WORDS TOM COWARD PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



At Gravetye Manor, head gardener Tom Coward has been renovating the gardens since 2010, giving William Robinson's 19th-century vision a contemporary twist. In the wilder orchard, Tom harvests apples, which though grown for their beauty are all put to use.





Every season has its joys in the garden, but if I had to pick a month it would be October. The light has a special quality at this time of year, somehow making colours appear richer as the borders reach their climax. This last display before the first frosts set in can feel like the garden shaking a fist at the approaching winter. Every drop of sunshine feels like the precious last sip from the bottle and best of all, this is the peak of the apple season.

Our orchard dates back to the 1890s when the charismatic garden writer William Robinson first moved to Gravetye. The romance of carefully shaped trees rising out of wildflower meadows was an essential element to his wild garden. He

chose his site carefully, on the edge of the property using the orchard to help blend the garden in to the surrounding forest. The sheltered, two-acre, south-facing slope is quite protected from frosts and cold winds and warms up in the summer to ripen some amazing fruit. Most of Robinson's trees have long gone, but a few ancient specimens still remain, mainly 'Blenheim Orange' and a few 'Crawley Beauty'. So as part of our garden restoration project we decided we had to plant a new generation of trees. This was essential to preserve this historic feature, and exciting to develop such a special crop for Gravetye's Michelin-starred restaurant.

The harvest starts in late August with 'Discovery' and runs deep into November, with 'Braeburn' probably being last. ▸

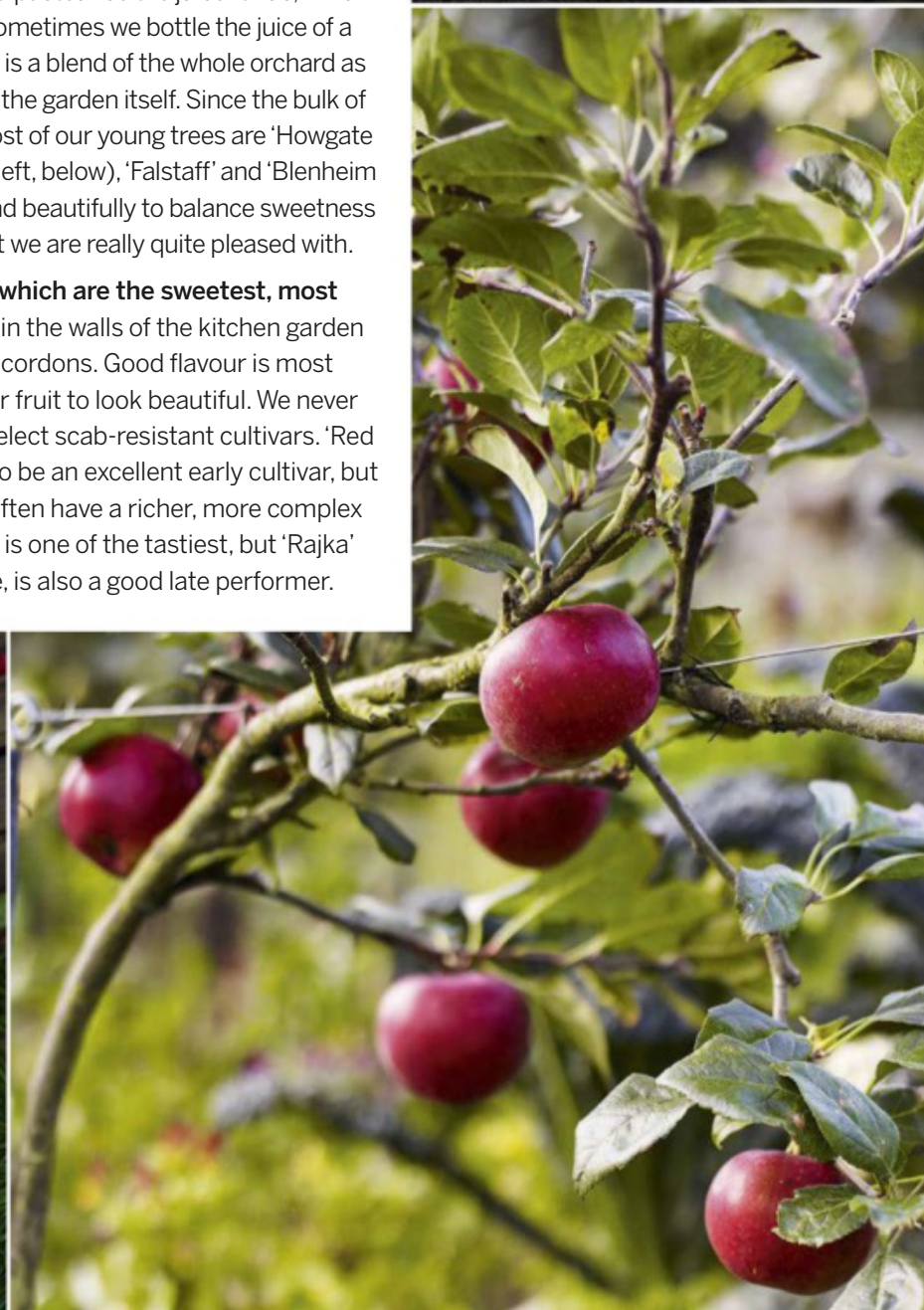
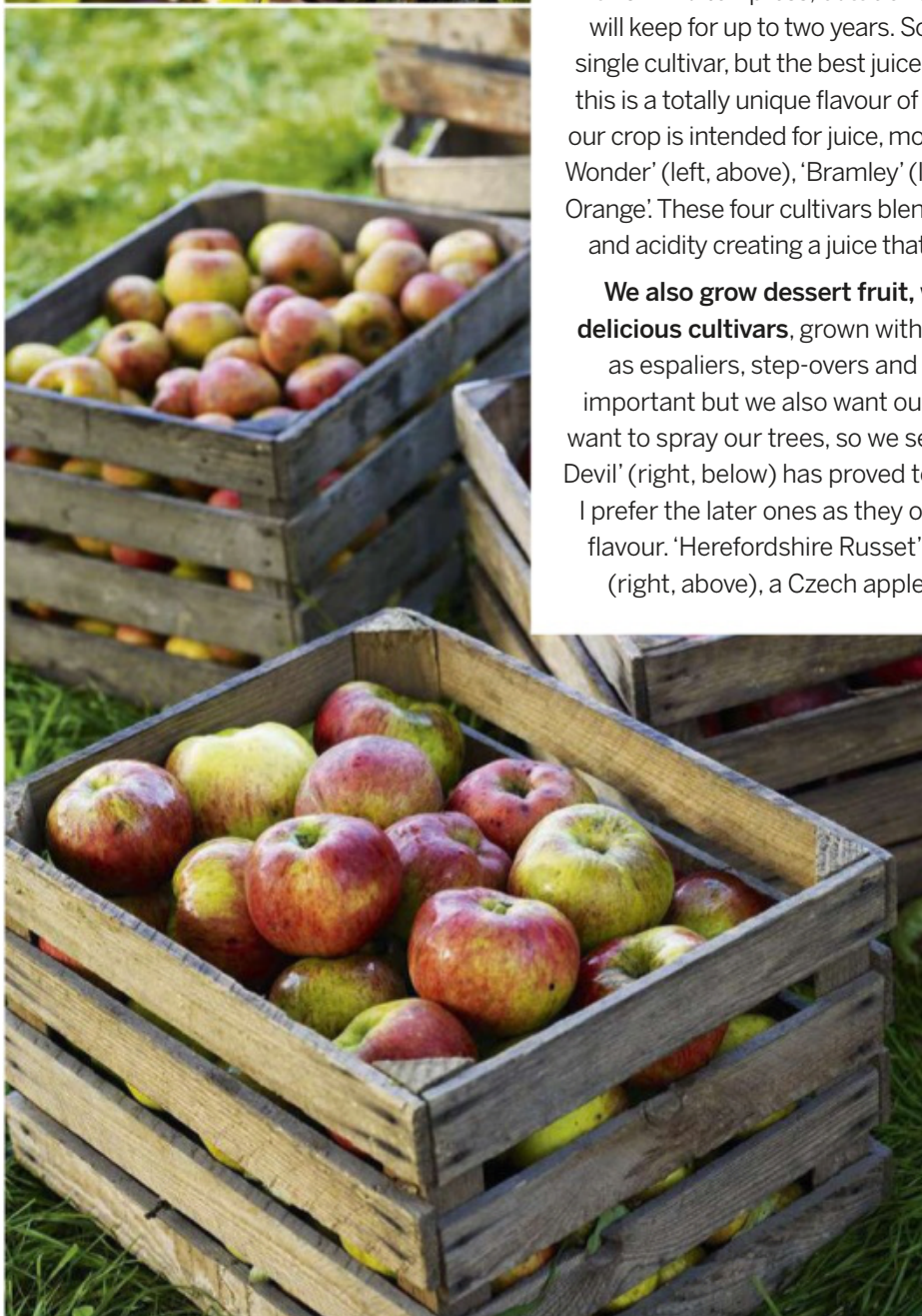


APPLES FOR DIFFERENT USES AT GRAVETYE MANOR

In Gravetye's restaurant, cooking apples are always in demand and Chef likes to save some to use throughout winter. For this we hand pick the highest-quality fruit, and 'Bramley' and 'Blenheim Orange' are two of the favourites. Both have such characteristic flavours, which only seem to improve with storage. 'Annie Elizabeth' has also proved to have excellent flavour and is one of the best for holding its shape with cooking. But even in a busy kitchen there is only so much fruit Chef can get through and so the bulk of our crop is made into juice. This means harvesting our big trees is quite simple as it doesn't matter if the fruit gets a little bruised. We just lay out a dust sheet or tarpaulin under the tree to keep the fruit clean and shake the apples down. The important thing is to make sure the fruit is totally ripe; the longer it can be left on the tree the better.

Once the crop has been gathered, we take it to a local juice maker who can press, bottle and pasteurise the juice for us, which will keep for up to two years. Sometimes we bottle the juice of a single cultivar, but the best juice is a blend of the whole orchard as this is a totally unique flavour of the garden itself. Since the bulk of our crop is intended for juice, most of our young trees are 'Howgate Wonder' (left, above), 'Bramley' (left, below), 'Falstaff' and 'Blenheim Orange'. These four cultivars blend beautifully to balance sweetness and acidity creating a juice that we are really quite pleased with.

We also grow dessert fruit, which are the sweetest, most delicious cultivars, grown within the walls of the kitchen garden as espaliers, step-overs and cordons. Good flavour is most important but we also want our fruit to look beautiful. We never want to spray our trees, so we select scab-resistant cultivars. 'Red Devil' (right, below) has proved to be an excellent early cultivar, but I prefer the later ones as they often have a richer, more complex flavour. 'Herefordshire Russet' is one of the tastiest, but 'Rajka' (right, above), a Czech apple, is also a good late performer.





▷ Most of our cultivars ripen around the second or third week of October and although the rest of the garden always needs attention, this is a relatively quiet time. So to set a few days aside to deal with a glut of wonderful fruit is a real pleasure. The trees we planted some seven years ago are rewarding us with decent crops and the years of regeneration pruning of our old specimens are beginning to pay off with bumper harvests.

Our orchard is designed as a wild garden and organised totally differently from commercial production. Instead of straight rows of dwarf trees, our apples are spaced erratically, and interplanted with thousands of naturalised bulbs. Each cultivar is grafted on vigorous and semi-vigorous rootstocks,

so the trees will become tall, majestic specimens, trained into traditional, open-centered, vase-shaped trees. We still expect the crop to pay for itself, and every fruit we produce is used.

Developing fruit growing at Gravetye has been one of the most exciting parts of my job. And to see diners in the restaurant, enjoying fruit picked from the trees outside, is one of the best rewards. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Gravetye Manor Hotel and Restaurant, Vowels Lane, West Hoathly, West Sussex RH19 4LJ.

Tel 01342 810567. **Website** gravetyemanor.co.uk



TOM'S TIPS FOR GROWING APPLES

Apples need full sun to grow well, but cookers and early cultivars can take a little shade. Frost pockets and windy, exposed sites are best avoided and all apples hate getting waterlogged.

Decide how you'll use the fruit before planting. Large orchard trees work well in a wild garden and produce lots of fruit, but it can be a lot of work to deal with big crops. Espaliers or cordons look smart and produce the best-quality fruit from the smallest space but take a lot of work to do well.

Take time to research and taste fruit. Many gardens and nurseries have apple days, which are a perfect opportunity to find cultivars that are special to you or your area.

Take time to decide on the best rootstock for your tree as this will govern its ultimate height and vigour. Dwarf rootstocks are more manageable and can fit into smaller gardens but may need care, such as staking and weeding. More vigorous rootstocks will give you a much bigger tree, with bigger crops that will live for much longer.

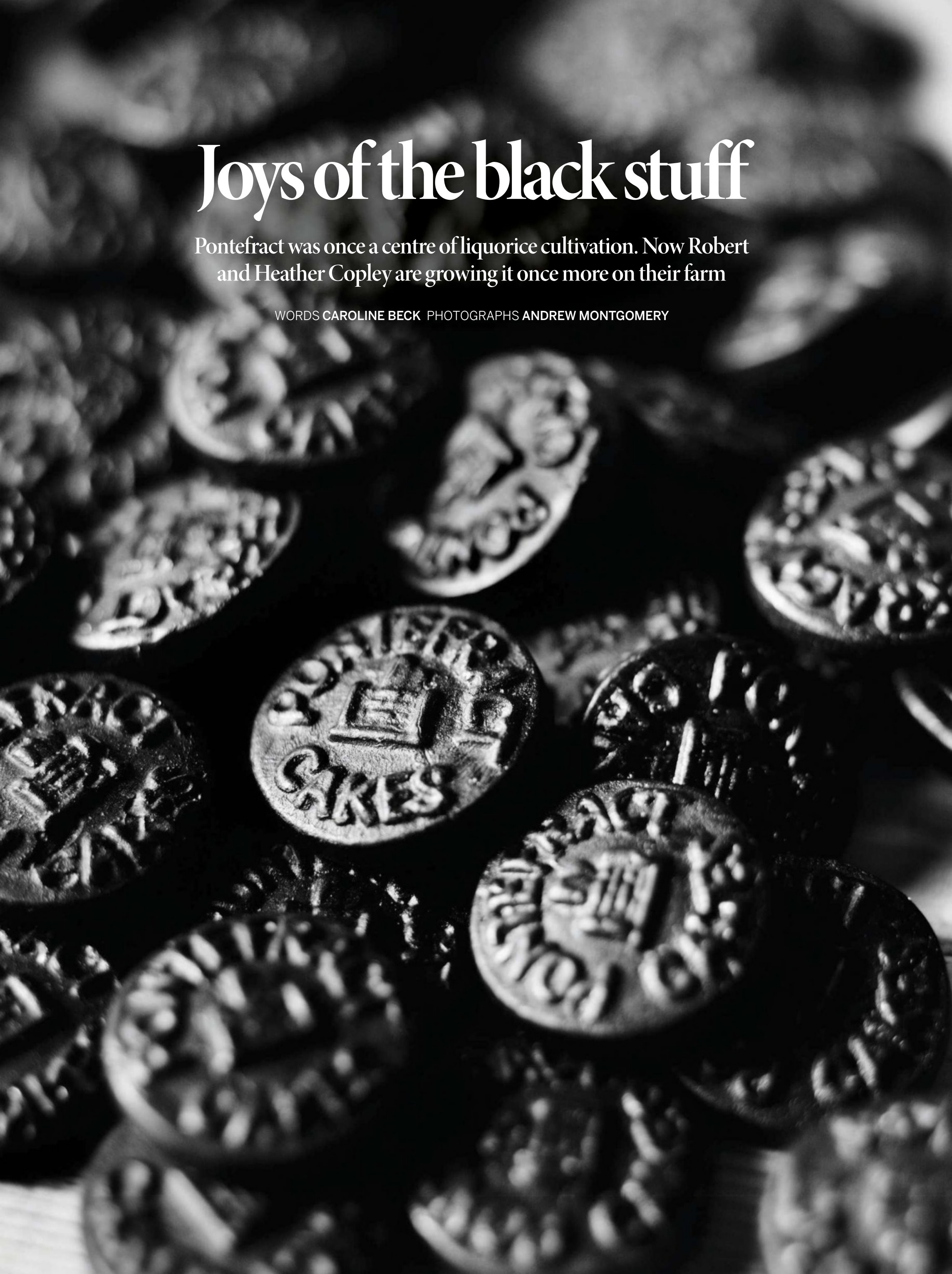
Control the environment. Young apples hate having their feet grassed over, and if the soil is kept open and you mulch around the tree's roots they have a much better chance of establishing. We control weeds around our trees and give them a thick layer of home-made compost each year.



Joys of the black stuff

Pontefract was once a centre of liquorice cultivation. Now Robert and Heather Copley are growing it once more on their farm

WORDS CAROLINE BECK PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY





This page Robert Copley harvesting the first crop of liquorice grown on the farm. Records show that the roots can grow up to eight metres long with the first harvest ready within five years.

Facing page The Pontefract, or Pomfret, cake is stamped with a stylised image of Pontefract Castle, a design that hasn't changed in almost 400 years.

Britons have had a taste for liquorice for nearly a thousand years, when it is thought that Crusaders returning from the Middle East brought it back with them for medicinal purposes

Liquorice is a black and white issue, its bitter-sweet taste causing you to either salivate or shudder. I was in the latter camp, the very smell enough to make me feel queasy, but a campaigning husband and wife farming team, Robert and Heather Copley, have converted me. After spending a morning with them harvesting 'wet' liquorice from their farm near Pontefract and eating the root straight from the ground, I can confidently declare that I'm a liquorice convert, having discovered, by the action of chewing it slowly, a fresh taste somewhere between sweetness and salt. Robert and Heather are not the only fans. They've been approached by perfumiers, tea producers, artisan brewers and top chefs across the country, all eager for something partly exotic and partly nostalgic, and about as far away from the stick-to-the-roof-of-your-mouth childhood sweets, as you can get.

Glycyrrhiza glabra (literally 'sweet root') is a member of the pea family that originates in the east Mediterranean and southwest Asia. Britons have had a taste for 'Spanish' (as it is colloquially known), for nearly a thousand years, when it's thought that Crusaders returning from the Middle East brought it back with them mainly for medicinal purposes – it's a powerful anti-inflammatory, as well as aiding digestion and soothing coughs, headaches and colds. The monks at Pontefract Priory grew it extensively in medieval times, the deep, sandy soil mimicking its native growing conditions. In 1700 a local chemist, George Dunhill, mixed the root with sugar to form a lozenge, the origination of the jet-black, embossed Pontefract cake still made today (but with imported liquorice). The town became synonymous with liquorice, with residents growing it on plots of land, or garths, behind their houses. During the 19th century, the town employed thousands of people in its commercial manufacture, but anecdotal evidence suggests that during the Second World War, American GIs introduced a treat-starved nation to chocolate, sounding the death knell of liquorice. Local producers went out of business until none were left. Until now.

The Copley family has been in dairy and arable farming for more than 140 years. A little over a decade ago, Heather, an agronomist by training, started hearing stories from their farm shop customers about eating wet liquorice as children. "They'd reminisce about chewing the root and the amazing taste. As many of them were in their eighties, we thought if we don't revive this, it'll die out forever." They began growing it experimentally several years ago, with roots sourced from local people, many of whom still grow it in their gardens. It takes five years to get a crop, but disaster struck after four, when contractors accidentally dug it up. "We replanted it in a safer spot up the hill. Our next problem was rabbits, who were mad about the sweet roots, so we had to put up an electric fence."

After another three years Heather couldn't wait any longer. "I had to go and see what it was doing. The root was about 30cm long and translucent, with almost a honey taste." Then in September 2016 the Copleys' patience paid off and the first substantial roots were harvested with a taste so different from standard liquorice that it was like another crop. As we stood in the fields at first light chewing on the fresh root, Heather told me that if you've got the right conditions – a deep, free-draining sandy soil that warms up quickly in spring and gets plenty of sun – the plant will thrive. And how it has. She dug up a root two metres long, unravelling it like something out of children's fairy tale, and still didn't reach the end. Historical records show that eight metres wouldn't be unusual. The Copleys' ambition is to bring liquorice growing back to the area and judging by the reaction to their first few harvests, they might have just rediscovered its sweet spot. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

The Copleys sell their wet liquorice and other liquorice products at their farm shop.

Address Ravensknowle Farm, Pontefract Road, Pontefract, West Yorkshire WF7 5AF.

Tel 01977 600200. **Website** farmercopleys.co.uk



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1 The liquorice stout, brewed with the Copleys' liquorice by Great Newsome Brewery, Hull, won gold at the World Beer Awards 2016.

2 Heather and Robert Copley on their farm near Pontefract. The area has a long association with liquorice growing.

3 The plants grow to about a metre high, but rarely flower in this country, so the energy goes into root production.

4 The long, snaking roots of the liquorice plant are harvested by hand.

5 Most liquorice sweets are now made with liquorice imported from Turkey.

6 The 'wet' roots are cut into sections, cleaned of soil, and sold to chew upon. Liquorice aids digestion and soothes coughs and sore throats.

7 The roots are deep and long, but regenerate quickly. Apart from rabbits, the plant seems to have no pests.

8 Heather digging up a liquorice crop.



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As frosts loom, the bare bones of the garden are exposed. There's a chance to draw breath, sketch out new garden layouts, flick through seed catalogues and hatch plans for the year to come

Winter

WINTER NOTES

In winter, once her plants have died back, Jojo takes stock of the allotment year and vows that next time around the weeds will be vanquished and the plot better tended

WORDS JOJO TULLOH ILLUSTRATIONS SARAH YOUNG

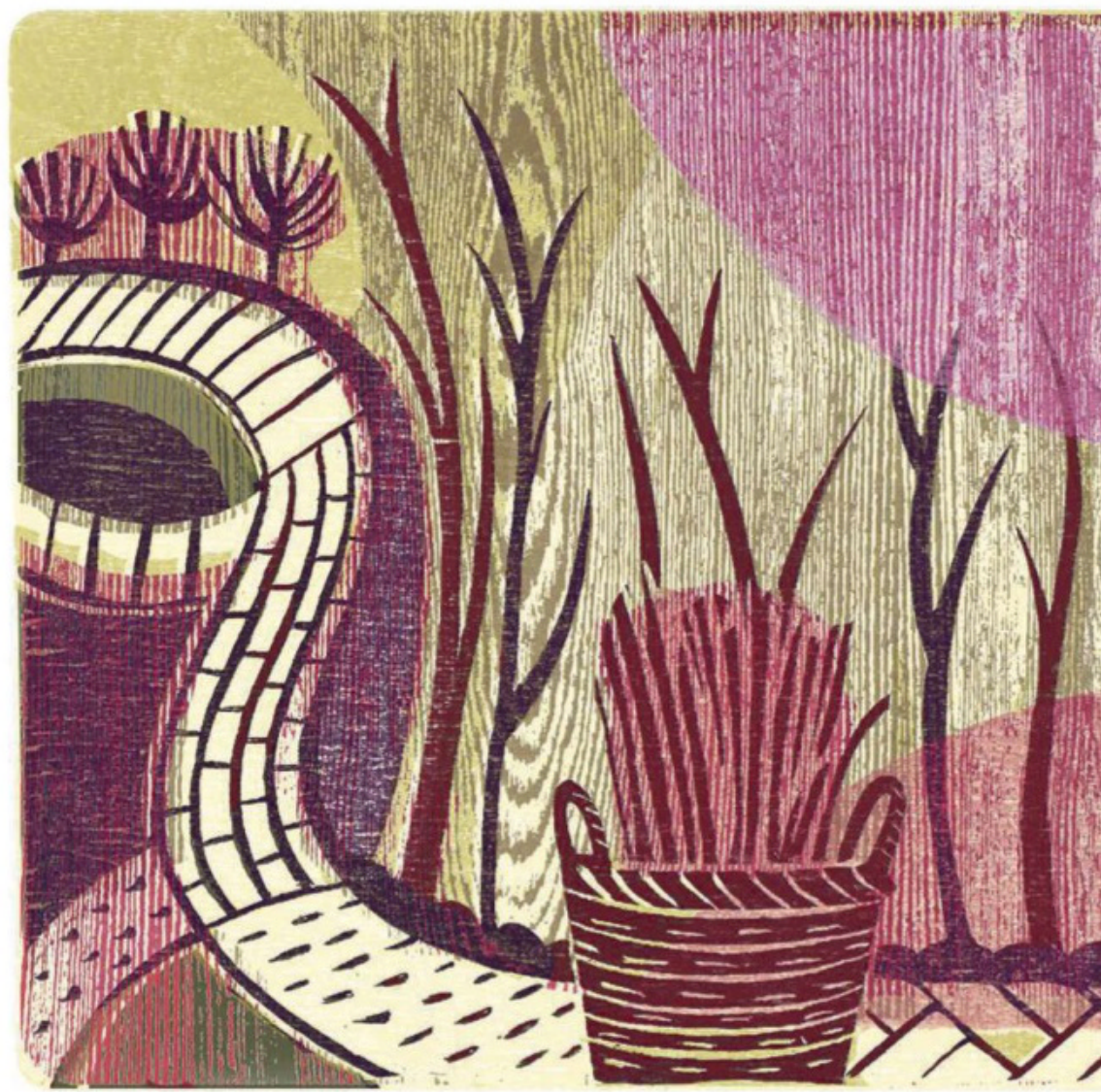
December

In the garden

Winter is a good time to think about what you have learned throughout the past year in your own and other people's gardens. My allotment has a very specific aesthetic: a bit ramshackle, sometimes a little overgrown. It is productive enough but I always strive to make it better and to that end I sketch ambitious plans in my notebook, sitting by a fire rather than out in the mud and cold.

Psychologically, I prefer winter to autumn, when I suffer my own allotment version of SAD (seasonal affective disorder). Each September I am plunged into gloom, the good intentions of last spring behind me; bindweed has taken hold, weaving a string of lantern-like seedheads through the branches of our 'Spartan' apple tree, while couch grass is knotting itself around the roots of the currant bushes, and the leaves of the newly planted gooseberry bushes are spotted grey with mildew. I berate myself for my sloppy gardening and, after picking a few armfuls of chard, late courgette flowers and salad, I usually run away without doing much. Far better is a crisp winter day when the plants have died back and I can see the skeleton of my plot start to emerge once again.

Gardening in isolation means bad habits can creep up on you. To stimulate better practice and jolt myself out of complacency, I visit other urban gardens. On a blisteringly hot day last July I cycled to a market garden in Dagenham in east London where Alice Holden (see growingcommunities.org/dagenham-farm) has transformed the glasshouses and growing spaces of a neglected council nursery into a one-and-a-half-acre organic farm. Alice managed a 100-acre farm in Wales before taking on the Dagenham Starter Farm in 2012. It was funded for two years through lottery money secured by Growing Communities, a not-for-profit social enterprise based in east London that runs a veg box scheme and sponsors apprentice growers. Now the farm



has to pay its way so Alice and her team of volunteers supply restaurants and residents with fresh produce.

In dire need of regeneration, Dagenham seemed to wilt in the heat but not so the farm; watered with stored rainwater, cucumbers, tomatoes and courgettes clambered through one greenhouse, while glossy beds of chard created a red and emerald carpet. In September I returned and went home with bags of newly harvested mixed leaves – pak choi, mustard, chard, rocket, frilly lettuce and sorrel – as well as multicoloured heritage tomatoes, swags of sunflowers and cosmos and, most importantly, a feeling that with a little more dedication I too could make a garden such as this.

In the kitchen

While otherwise delicious, when it comes to colour, winter cooking can verge on dingy. All those braises and stews mean brown is often in the ascendant. Import a little zing by using the viridifloric essence of herbs and spinach to tint sauces, soups and, in this case, aioli (garlic mayonnaise) a vivid green. Make a green oil by whizzing together 50-75g of parsley (later on, wild garlic and nettles work a treat, as do fennel tops) and 100ml of extra virgin olive oil in a food processor. When the mixture is smooth, push it through a sieve and you will have a bright-green oil with which to dye your aioli. Crush two peeled cloves of garlic in a pestle and place in a liquidiser with two egg yolks. Beat the yolks and garlic with a teaspoon of salt and a teaspoon of white pepper. Pour in the oil (150ml extra virgin olive oil including the green oil) in a thin stream, adding a little boiled then cooled warm water if it starts to get too thick, whisk in the juice of one lemon and then add 150ml of sunflower oil, again in a thin stream. Store in the fridge, covered until needed.



Psychologically, I prefer winter to autumn, when I berate myself for my sloppy gardening. Far better is a crisp winter day when the plants have died back and I can see the skeleton of my plot start to emerge once again

Just as green is in short supply at this time of year, so is crunch. I keep a jar or two of sprouting seeds on the windowsill. It's a fun thing to do with children and the sprouts themselves are bursting with the kind of goodness you can do with during the darker months. Eat them raw in winter slaws of shredded cabbage, beetroot, red onion, coriander and chickpeas, add them to sandwiches or cook them in stir fries. I have a special sprouting jar with a mesh top but you can use an ordinary jam jar and some coarse cloth or fabric held down with an elastic band.

Take a scrupulously clean jam jar, put two tablespoons of seeds (you can use mung beans, radish, chickpeas, alfalfa or sunflower seeds) in the jar and cover with water. Fix the cloth on and leave to soak. Place your jar in a corner of the kitchen out of direct sunlight. The next morning drain off the water through the mesh/fabric. That way you don't lose seeds. Rinse with cold water and drain again. The better you look after your sprouts, the nicer they will be. Try not to leave any water in the jar. Do this every morning and evening and on the fourth or fifth day, when your sprouts are growing, move them into the light to green up. Pull apart what you need. If you want you can float them in water to get rid of any hulls (the outside of the seed) and then drain and use. Try them with mashed avocado, a poached egg and toast for an admirably healthy start to the day. They keep well for a day or two in a ziplock plastic bag in the fridge.

What to do

- Read. Take advantage of inclement days and refresh your knowledge. Recap on things you think you know (sowing and cultivation, for example) and gain inspiration for new directions in the coming year – I'm planning to plant a Sichuan pepper plant (*Zanthoxylum schinifolium*).
- Use dry days to lay down paths. Whether you like herringboned bricks, woodchip, cockle shells or gravel, this is an ideal time to add some structure. Mulch fruit trees and bushes with compost or muck and, if you are at war with bindweed, consider using a thick weed-suppressant fabric, such as Mypex, around perennials. Keep an eye on brassicas and chicories and pull off any rotting or yellowing leaves, separate leaves back and pick off any slugs feasting on the hearts. If you happen to be near the sea, collect seaweed from the beach and thickly cover your asparagus beds. Cut sticks for peas and beans while trees are leafless. On fine days, prune blackcurrants and gooseberries and thin out raspberries. Order some leek seeds for a January sowing. I like the look of the very hardy 'Bleu de Solaise' blue winter leek, available from Real Seeds.

What to cook

Cardoons

The food of the past doesn't often sound that appetising but now and then you come across a book with a surprisingly modern touch. Louis-Eustache Ude (1769-1846) was the original temperamental French chef. Apprenticed in the kitchens of Louis XVI, during his career he worked for many rich and demanding patrons, including Napoleon Bonaparte's mother. He achieved immense fame as a chef at Crockford's, an opulent semi-legal gambling club in St James's Street, London. Ude had a reputation for vanity but his book, *The French Cook* (published 1813), is full of sound recipes and a great variety of vegetable dishes. One of his favourite winter vegetables was the cardoon. See how you fare with this recipe.

Acidulate a bowl of water with the **juice of 1 lemon** and then, with a paring knife, peel away the fibrous rib and the spiky sides of a **bunch (around 900g) of cardoon stems**. Rub off any of the white fuzz with a clean tea towel and pop the stalks into the bowl. Bring a pan of salted water to the boil and drop in the cardoons. Cook for 12 minutes or so, drain and allow to cool before slicing into 1cm or so thick chunks. Make a tomato sauce by sizzling **2 cloves chopped garlic** in a pan with **2tbsp olive oil**, pinch of **chilli flakes** and a **long strip of lemon peel**. If you have **fresh marjoram**, chop and add that. Pour in **2 400g tins tomatoes** and cook for about 15 minutes, breaking up the sauce with a wooden spoon before adding the cardoons and cooking for another 20 minutes.

January

In the garden

January is a month that is best spent reading seed catalogues by the fire. It's a time for taking stock and planning next year's crops, with flavour in mind. I may be biased but I think cooks who grow their own fruit and vegetables are a cut above the average kitchen incumbent. Not only do they work with ingredients of enviable taste and freshness but the need to make time for both horticultural and culinary tasks requires a delicate balancing act. The kitchen gardener has to think ahead, to feed the earth in autumn in order to produce slim, green, finger-length courgettes the following June, and to turn the surplus fruits of late summer into wine-dark jellies or rich and savoury chutneys that will sustain you until next year's harvest. Having the time to plan all of this is a winter treat.

Any visits you do make to your plot may well be more for boosting your mental health than for any actual gardening but there are a few tasks for days when the sun is out and the ground is not waterlogged or frozen. Most rhubarb needs little more attention than a good mulch with muck or compost and a check to see that crowns aren't waterlogged and rotting (check your asparagus too if you have it). If you have more than one well-established rhubarb crown, you might like to try forcing it. Pop an old chimney pot with a tile on top of the pot (or use similarly tall plastic drum or bucket ideally black to retain heat) over a few promising buds and a few weeks later you will have very long, very pale and straight pink stalks. Forcing weakens the plant, which will not be as productive in following years. For a slower kind of forcing (which results in great flavour) cover the plants in autumn with dead leaves a foot high (surrounded by chicken wire to stop the leaves blowing away). Leaf mould is a happy by-product of this method.



Towards the end of the month give apple and pear trees a winter prune. Refer to a good pruning guide but in short you are aiming to remove crossing, diseased or broken branches first and then shorten the previous year's growth. My plum trees functioned as an aphid superhighway last summer so this month I will also be giving them a thorough spray with an organic plant oil winter wash. I use Vitax Winter Wash, which is widely available.

Beekeepers should check on hives to make sure they have not been blown over or the entrance blocked by snow or leaves but leave well alone otherwise.

In the kitchen

I used to be a much better cook than gardener. I got my allotment – where my vegetable-growing education began from scratch – a good decade after I had become competent in the kitchen. More than 15 years on the desire to grow as much fresh produce as possible myself has forced me to become a more skilful and attentive gardener, while the need to respond to my hard-earned plenty has also made me a more imaginative cook. When I get back from a bright, cold morning at the allotment and sit down to a meal of peppery winter salad leaves (rocket, sorrel, mustard and deep-red chicory 'Treviso Rosso') eaten with home-made sourdough bread and cheese with chutney made from last year's glut of apples and plums I feel good. The circle is complete.

Now is the time to plan for next season's harvest. I make extravagant wish lists from my favourite catalogues – Tuckers Seeds, Franchi Seeds, Chiltern Seeds and The Organic Gardening Catalogue – but I also comb through cookbooks such as *Chez Panisse Vegetable* by Alice L Waters and Jane Grigson's *Vegetable Book* for cultivars and crops new to me. I check what did well



Towards the end of the month give apple and pear trees a winter prune, aiming to remove crossing, diseased or broken branches first and then shorten the previous year's growth

last year, look back at past orders to see what I've forgotten and then I sort through the biscuit tin that holds my seeds to see which are still viable. I seem to be entering my tisane years so I will be reworking my herb garden with that in mind. Jekka McVicar has a beautifully packaged Herbal Infusion Seed Collection, which includes camomile, fennel, hyssop, thyme and lemon balm, and is available from Jekka's wonderful website (see page 106). To Jekka's infusion I normally also add bergamot, oat flowers, lavender and mint.

What you have growing in January will vary greatly. The better prepared will have stores of potatoes and carrots with leeks, parsnips, chicory, chard, cabbage, Brussels sprouts and Jerusalem artichoke still in the ground. If you are more of a fair-weather allotment gardener, sorrel is a wonderful winter crop. It thrives on very little attention and tolerates semi-shade, making it a good plant for back gardens. I adore it for the bright taste of lemons it delivers, especially welcome in midwinter when it makes a good alternative to basil cut into thin strips as a fresh herb to be added at the last minute, although when cooked it goes a slightly sludgy brown colour. I cut it into ribbons and then use it on top of pizzas made with taleggio and potato or to liven up salads of shop-bought 'Little Gem' or waxy boiled potatoes dressed with thinly sliced shallots, olive oil and red wine vinegar.

What to do

- There is still time to plant garlic. I usually plant mine in November but this year I've been tempted by the idea that spring planting allegedly makes for rounder, more symmetrical bulbs (plus less time weeding). As long as the bulb gets a month at less than 10°C all should be well. The Garlic Farm on the Isle of Wight has a Spring Planting Pack of four bulbs, including the fiercely flavoured 'Picardy Wight', adapted to cool, wet conditions, the superbly flavoured 'Solent Wight' and the 'Mersley Wight'. It also offers a Winter Planting Pack comprising 'Provence Wight', Carcasonne Wight' and 'Elephant Garlic' for planting to the end of January.
- Now is the time to sow rhubarb sets or cut your own from the youngest most vigorous roots of older clumps by taking a root section 15-20cm long that ends in a fat bud. Plant in a trench full of manure or compost with the bud just showing and do not pick the first year. Ashridge Trees (ashridgetrees.co.uk) has 'The Sutton', 'Timperley Early' and 'Stockbridge Arrow' Thompson & Morgan sells potted rhubarb plants, including 'Victoria' and 'Giant Grooveless Crimson'.

What to cook

- One of my favourite ways to use sorrel is in an **omelette**. For a single omelette take **2 eggs (good free-range ones), 1tbsp water, dab of butter, handful of sorrel leaves (no stalks) sliced into ribbons, sea salt and pepper, 2tbsp freshly grated parmesan** Crack the eggs into a bowl, whisk well and add water. Heat a heavy frying pan over a medium to high heat and add the butter. Let it melt and swirl around the pan. When it is good and hot add the egg. Tip the pan so that the egg evenly covers the bottom, coating it thinly. Throw in the sorrel, season and add the parmesan. After just over a minute give the pan a little tap on the cooker to dislodge the omelette and tip it out on to your plate. Eat up with a good slice of bread and butter and a few leaves from the winter garden.
- **Salads** that invigorate and revitalise are the perfect food for January and will stop you from succumbing to root vegetable ennui. Chicory is a great foil for strong flavours, such as blue cheese and walnuts, but this bright-tasting salad is made with fennel and blood oranges: **4 blood oranges, 1 bulb fennel (outer leaves removed), 1 head crisp chicory leaves (whichever variety you have grown), 1tbsp olive oil, sea salt and black pepper** Trim and slice the fennel into thin shavings. With a sharp knife cut off the top and bottom of the oranges, and remove the rest of the peel and pith as carefully as you can. Slice the oranges into thin discs and remove the pips. Arrange on a serving dish (or individual plates) with the fennel and chicory leaves and zigzag over the oil. Season and serve.

February

In the garden

Most gardeners maintain two gardens, one real and susceptible to slugs, and one imaginary in which every plant succeeds. The size of your plot is of little consequence; whatever its dimensions, you are prone to the same paralysing malaise of the ideal. Whether you have a substantial acreage, a slither of town garden, a postage-stamp-sized yard or a few feet of balcony on which to put pots, beware too much fantasy gardening. A bit of dreaming is fine. After all, a gardener's imagination is what sustains them through the winter but at some point ambition must be turned into practical application.

Last year I worked hard to make my allotment more productive by concentrating on two large central beds, which were well manured and closely planted with annual vegetables. My yield increased but other parts of the garden suffered. The most glaring failure was the herb patch; low-growing thyme, marjoram and oregano were swamped by over-vigorous borage, lemon balm and bindweed. This year I will enclose my herb garden to make it more functional. I could make a raised herb bed or plant a square of box hedging but instead I am going to make a herb rock garden. One of my favourite food writers, Patience Gray, author of the cult cookbook and memoir *Honey from a Weed*, spent half a lifetime in Apulia in southern Italy, in a house that backed on to a stony hillside fragrant with herbs and littered with rough white stone, scrubby aromatic shrubs and ancient olive trees. The indigenous herbs and weeds of this landscape were central to her cooking.

I can't recreate Apulia in Leytonstone but I can raise my plants up and create the well-drained, less fertile conditions many herbs thrive in. Having consulted Reginald Farrer (1880-1920) in his comprehensive book, *The English Rock Garden*, I learn that the stones of the perfect rock garden should be laid so that there is a



‘feeling of calm, of real inevitability and balance’. For Farrer, there is only one rock: limestone, a rock of such ‘singular beauty of colour and outline’ that to his mind even a child could fit block to block together like a jigsaw. He advises using fewer, larger rocks, buried deeply and firmly with their broadest side exposed for a flattened effect and with all rocks sloping backwards so that moisture runs back to the roots of the plants. In my rock garden I will grow dill, summer and winter savory, fennel and lovage, sage, oregano, marjoram, hyssop and thyme and, in a separate bed surrounding it, parsley, chervil, coriander, sorrel and tarragon.

In the kitchen

A herb garden should be more than aromatic window dressing. It should be a key part of your everyday cooking. But how can you know which herbs you will find most useful before you have planted them? Here are some of my favourite uses for common herbs, to think about as you wait for summer to come again:

Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) I use thin snippets of sorrel fresh in dals, omelettes, tarts and scattered over pizza before serving but you can also use it to make a delicate sauce with cream that can be served with poached eggs. Gently melt 20g of butter with 125g of sorrel leaves. Gradually add 125ml of cream, thinned with a little stock or water. This sauce is also good with fish.

Tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*) Make an aromatic white wine vinegar by stuffing a bottle of good wine vinegar with a few branches of true French tarragon (more aromatic than the Russian kind) and leaving in the bottle until it is used up. Fresh, it goes well with chicken or fish, in vinaigrette, and in Béarnaise sauce.

Chervil (*Anthriscus cerefolium*) Chop fresh chervil with equal quantities of chives, tarragon and parsley very finely in to make the classic French culinary mixture *finest herbes*. The opportunity to eat



A herb garden should be more than aromatic window dressing. It should be a key part of your everyday cooking. Many herbs thrive in well-drained, less fertile conditions so a rock garden could be the answer

omelette *aux fines herbes* is reason enough for planting a herb garden. Scatter a tablespoon over an omelette just before you turn it.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*) Gremolata is an Italian condiment traditionally made with lemon zest and parsley and eaten with braised meats. My version uses the zest of half an orange, a garlic clove, peeled and then minced, four tablespoons of parsley, two sage leaves and a tablespoon of roasted hazelnuts, and salt and black pepper, all chopped very finely and combined.

Watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*) Although more commonly thought of as a salad leaf, the peppery watercress is also a useful herb. Available all year round, it can be used to make herb butter or in place of mustard to flavour sauces or to garnish meats.

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) If you grow your own fennel or can collect it in the wild, spend a summer day collecting pollen with a small artist's brush. When stored in a jam jar, fennel makes a highly aromatic dust for roast pork. If that seems too fiddly, use sun-dried stalks to flavour stocks and fish soups.

Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*) A strong herb, rosemary should be used sparingly. I like to add a little freshly chopped to tinned tomato sauces but you can also use a twig of rosemary dipped in olive oil to baste roast meats either on the barbecue or in the oven.

Bay leaf (*Laurus nobilis*) As well as using a bay leaf tied into a bundle with thyme and parsley stalks to make bouquet garni, I add one (plus a little milk) to the water I boil my potatoes in for mash. □

What to do

- Most of the things I get wrong at the allotment happily disappear back into the ground. Sadly, that's not quite the case when it comes to pruning. I wasn't really thinking ahead when I planted two half-standard plum trees (one greengage and one damson) a few months before the birth of our third daughter. The ensuing years saw me rather neglect their pruning. When I saw that the trees were towering over my neighbour's plot, I cut them back a little too ferociously. They responded by shooting out a multitude of thin, whippy water shoots like witches' fingers. They reproach me every time I pass. During a dry, cold spell at the end of winter I plan to thin them out. To shape them, I've taken some 17th-century advice. William Lawson's *New Orchard and Garden* book has a woodblock print describing 'the perfect Forme of fruit tree'. Another 17th-century gardener, John Evelyn, writes that the 'principal art of a gardener consists in pruning', which makes me feel even worse. Better is his graceful phrase describing the ideal shape of a small fruit tree: 'keep hollow like a bell'. I will hold that in my mind as I prune.

What to cook

Zhug (Yemeni hot sauce)

This fiery Yemeni relish is as addictive as it is hot. I first came across it in a shop in Los Angeles called Cookbook, a combined greengrocers and deli that had so many of my favourite things on offer that I almost felt as though I had managed to conjure it up myself. One thing I hadn't heard of was *zhug* but I bought it on faith. You can swirl it into light broths and bean soups, mix it with yoghurt and dip your bread in it, or use it as a relish for meat or fish. You can use dried red chillies (deseeded and soaked for half an hour and then scraped of their pulp) instead of green chillies to make a red version or add chopped tomatoes and fenugreek seeds to turn it into a very similar Yemeni relish called *hilbeh*.

1tsp caraway seeds, 1tsp cumin seeds, seeds from 8 cardamom pods, 1tsp black peppercorns, 4 slim green chillies deseeded and chopped, 1tsp salt, 6-8 garlic cloves, peeled and chopped, a bunch of parsley, 1 bunch of coriander, juice of 1 lemon. Makes about 275ml.

In a spice grinder or pestle, mill the cumin, caraway, cardamom and black pepper until fine. Cut the stalks off the herbs and blend in a food processor with the other ingredients, scraping down the sides until you have a fine purée. Add the spices and combine. Keeps for a week or two in the fridge.

A wholesome harvest

Organic vegetable grower, author and no-dig exponent Charles Dowding advises how to plan your winter vegetable garden

WORDS CHARLES DOWDING PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



This page Winter squash (*Cucurbita maxima*) is an excellent winter crop. Sow mid-April under cover, plant by the end of May and harvest from mid-September once fruits are full colour and have hard skins. Best success in cooler areas is with 'Uchiki Kuri', a tasty red squash of 750g-1kg average.

Facing page Charles Dowding in his intensively cropped, quarter-acre organic vegetable garden in Somerset. He supplies local restaurants and vegetable boxes, and teaches day and weekend courses at his garden.



Growing seedlings in a greenhouse gains time, often a whole month's growth

Throughout winter in my garden in Somerset, I pick Brussels sprouts, kale, leek, swede and parsnip, and in mild weather there are leaves of land cress, mustards, salad rocket and spinach. I work on a quarter acre of undug, surface-composted beds and sell freshly harvested salad leaves and vegetables to local shops and restaurants all year round, and I also use the garden for teaching courses. To get the most from my plot, I need to plan carefully and winter is the best time to work out what and when to crop.

Vegetables are hungry plants so it's important to keep your soil fertile. Weed your plot thoroughly (or mulch with cardboard if weeds are thick), then feed your soil by spreading a 3-5cm layer of well-composted organic matter on the surface. This improves the nutrient levels and soil structure as well as encouraging earthworms and other beneficial soil life. After winter frosts your soil should have a friable tilth good for plantings and be capable of slowly releasing nutrients throughout the year. Early weeding is key: on a dry afternoon in March scuff the surface lightly with a rake to kill weed seedlings. Repeat in April and you'll be well on your way to creating weed-free beds, with undisturbed and well-structured soil below. When replanting in summer, all you need to do is clear away the old crop and pop in the new seeds and plants.

Most winter-cropping vegetables need longer to grow than summer-harvesting vegetables, and some need sowing at precise times to enable them to mature in the autumn while the soil is still warm. Aim to keep sowing and planting throughout summer to extend your harvest into winter.

When planning winter crops, check what grows best in your climate. Then, according to the speed of growth, assign each vegetable to one of three categories. The first category should include vegetables requiring a whole growing season to mature (such as Brussels sprouts, cabbage for hearts, winter squash, celeriac and parsnip; the first three need plenty of space). The second category includes vegetables that need only half a season to grow. This group should be divided into those that grow best in the first half of the year (such as garlic, onions, broad beans, shallots and second-early potatoes) and those that grow best in the second half (including swede, turnip, chard, chicories, endive, kale, leek, purple sprouting broccoli and salad leaves). Obviously, before planting those that grow in the second half of the season, the ground can be used for the first-half season vegetables, as well as any quick-maturing crops. A few half-season vegetables (such as beetroot, carrot and spinach) grow well in either half of the year. The third category should include winter-harvested perennial vegetables, such as Taunton Deane and Daubenton's kales, Welsh onion, skirret and sorrel. They require a clear decision on where to plant, separate from annual vegetables.

Now make a rough plan of the vegetables in the second category, putting brackets around any veg that grow best in the first half of the year. Beside them you can note any vegetables that grow in the second half, to plant in summer after clearing the first harvest. For example: (potatoes) kale, (peas) beetroot, (spinach) leek, (onions) chicories, (broad beans) spinach, and (beetroot) coriander. This helps with timing and keeping beds full. However, plans are just a starting point and are likely to change because of weather, failed sowings and pests; be prepared to fill unexpected gaps with new plants, hence it's wise to grow a few extra.

The only vegetables I sow directly into the soil are carrot, parsnip and corn salad. Growing seedlings in a greenhouse gains time, often a whole month's growth. It's good to sow seed while summer harvests are beginning to ripen, and you can even interplant in July between maturing shallots or onions. After lifting your onions in early August, you can plant July-sown chard, chicories for radicchio hearts, herbs, such as coriander and chervil, kale and many salads.

By early October the garden can be fuller than at any other time of year, and you will have already stored many vegetables to enjoy over the coming winter. I still find it remarkable that the garden produces these precious winter harvests, and I wish you every success in growing them. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

To discover more about Charles's gardening methods and upcoming events and courses, visit charlesdowding.co.uk

Favourite winter crops

1 Beetroot (*Beta vulgaris*) A reliable staple. Sow four seeds in 4cm modules, to plant within a month of sowing as clumps of three to five seedlings, 30cm apart.

2 Brussels sprouts (*Brassica oleracea* var. *gemmifera*) Hardy but may need netting against birds. Sow from April to mid-May, preferably under fine mesh to avoid flea beetle. Plant out by mid-June, spacing 60cm apart in rows 75cm apart.

3 Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) Sow direct in March to May, 5cm apart, in rows 35cm apart. Keep seedbed moist and thin seedlings where necessary. Harvest during winter as required. Roots go down well in undug, heavy soil with compost on top.

4 Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) For hearts by November, sow red radicchios ('Palla Rossa') and 'Sugarloaf' in late June to early July, for planting after potato and onion harvest. Sow 'Witloof' in May for roots to dig out and pot on in November, for forcing sweet chicons (blanched buds) in a dark cupboard. Plant seedlings 30cm apart.

5 Salad rocket (*Eruca vesicaria* subsp. *sativa*) Sow direct or three seeds per module, space closer for baby leaves, wider for large ones (15cm apart). Sow August for harvests from mid-September onwards: they survive frost but produce less in winter.

6 Celeriac (*Apium graveolens* var. *rapaceum*) Difficult but worth attempting in heavy, damper soils. Sow in March and prick into modules for planting 35cm apart in mid-May. Harvest in November.

7 Purple sprouting broccoli (*Brassica oleracea* Italica Group) These form large plants but can be sown as late as June. Choose a variety to mature from late winter to mid-spring, according to preference. Plant 60cm apart.

8 Leeks (*Allium ampeloprasum* Porrum Group) You can grow shallow-planted leeks from multi-sown modules, three in a clump, or larger ones from individual plants, all sown early April and planted by end of June. Grow 'Bandit', 'Husky' and 'Apollo' for winter hardiness and harvest from January to April.

9 Kale (*Brassica oleracea* Acephala Group) Perennial varieties are easy to grow and productive. Otherwise, sow annuals such as 'Red Russian', 'Cavolo Nero', 'Hungry Gap' or 'Thousand Head' in June to plant in July. Plant perennial kale 75cm apart and annuals 45cm apart.

• For more information on when to sow and harvest vegetable crops see page 104.





This page Garlic is an overwinter crop you can sow from September until February and then harvest your crops from May to July.

Facing page Jojo Tulloh harvests her summer garlic crops from her east London allotment.

Flavour of the month

Garlic is one of the healthiest ways to add flavour to food and early winter is the time to plant out cloves ready for harvest come summer. Allotmenteer Jojo Tulloh explains how to get started

WORDS JOJO TULLOH PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY



If you grow your own garlic, you can have a bit of France, the Black Sea or Spain in your patch

Why grow garlic? Taste is the simple answer. The sweet, subtle flavours of a home-grown bulb will put you off acrid, long-stored shop garlic for ever. Grow garlic yourself and you can eat it at every stage, snipping the spring onion-like greens into tarts and soups in February and later on harvesting the curly green stalk-like flower buds or ‘scapes’ (to use like green beans or asparagus). At harvest time the baked heads of the ‘wet’ new garlic can be roasted whole and the dried crop eaten until Christmas and beyond. Even months after lifting, a home-grown bulb still retains its sweetness. On top of taste, garlic has long been used for centuries to fight disease and infection, and today is thought to help lower both cholesterol levels and blood pressure.

Garlic farmer Colin Boswell believes it’s the range of so many individual cultivars that makes garlic growing exciting. “For the amateur grower it’s the provenance of these bulbs that is their strong selling point,” he says. “If you grow your own, you can have a bit of France, the Black Sea or Spain in your patch. I love the Heritage hardnecks from Eastern Europe; they have big cloves, they’re easy peeling and incredibly juicy.”

Garlic is a straightforward crop. If you can grow a pot of narcissi, you can probably manage a row of garlic. Just find a patch of sunny ground and push the cloves into a hole made with a dibber or your finger. Seed garlic supplier and market gardener Jennifer Birch advises dressing your soil with rock potash and bone meal applied at around 50g per square metre before planting. She plants her cloves 20cm apart with the soil just covering the tip of the garlic (no more than 25mm beneath the surface) in rows 20cm apart, with alternate rows planted diagonally to each other to create a herringbone pattern. In smaller gardens the spacing can be reduced to 10cm. “The garlic will push up out of the ground as it grows and should be gently pushed back in at this stage, taking care not to damage the roots,” she says. When you split a garlic head you also get a number of tiny elongated cloves. These, Jennifer suggests, should be planted together and harvested as you would spring onions.

As well as being low maintenance, garlic has another advantage: it’s an overwinter crop, grown when other crops are dormant. You can sow from September to the following February to harvest from May to July. Don’t wait until the green leaves have fallen over as with onions – if you do this, you may find your garlic bulbs have split when you dig them up. Instead poke around beneath the soil regularly to check the bulbs have not started splitting up. Otherwise it’s simply a case of running a hoe down the rows to keep them weed free and watering. “The really critical months for watering are in late spring,” says Colin. “If you let the plants dry out in April or May, they will assess the water available and decide to make a smaller bulb.”

When you’re satisfied with the size of the bulbs, choose a dry, sunny day to lift and spread the bulbs out over the soil (if no rain is forecast) or under cover with ventilation. When the heads are good and dry, trim the stem down to about 6cm and cut off the roots, rub away the dirty outer layers of skin with your thumb and plait together. When the growing is done comes the delight of discovering the depth of flavours really fresh garlic will bring to your cooking. □

USEFUL INFORMATION

The Garlic Farm on the Isle of Wight stocks many of the cultivars listed here.

Address The Garlic Farm Mersley Lane, Newchurch, Isle of Wight PO36 0NR.

Tel 01983 865378. **Website** thegarlicfarm.co.uk

Don’t be tempted to plant cloves from a shop-bought garlic, which may be a cultivar better suited to warmer climates. Instead make sure you source your bulbs from a good supplier.

Good garlic to grow

Nine great garlics to plant in early winter and harvest from May to July

Allium sativum var. *ophioscorodon* ‘Extra Early Wight’

A large, white softneck, with a crisp, fresh flavour. Ready end of May. Has a white bulb streaked with mauve.

A. sativum ‘Iberian Wight’

Large, fat, white garlic with purple stripes. From southwest Spain, it is an excellent all-round garlic with large cloves perfect for Spanish dishes, especially tomatoes.

A. sativum var. *ophioscorodon* ‘Red Duke’

A hardneck, heritage garlic from Moravia in the Czech Republic. It has plump, purple cloves and a fierce, spicy flavour.

A. ampeloprasum ‘Elephant’

Less intense than some cultivars, with a warm, mild flavour. Roasted whole, the large head makes for a spectacular feast.

A. sativum ‘Solent Wight’

A cultivar Colin Boswell of The Garlic Farm highly recommends both for its flavour and the length of time it keeps – normally around nine months.

A. sativum var. *ophioscorodon* ‘Lautrec Wight’

One of Jennifer Birch’s favourites and considered by many to be one of the most flavoursome. Can be planted in autumn or early spring, but not good for wet conditions.

A. sativum ‘Germidour’

An early cropping garlic with a rich purple head and ivory cloves. The reliably big heads must be checked regularly for splitting pre-harvest. AGM*.

A. sativum ‘Thermidrôme’

Traditional cultivar producing large, white heads and cloves. Plant October to November for a July harvest, but use by Christmas after cropping.

A. sativum ‘Arno’

With a white head and pink cloves, this new cultivar has the largest bulbs of any long-dormancy type. Will string or plait easily and keeps well. AGM.

• For more information on when to sow and harvest vegetable crops see page 104.





This image Chris Pike been inspired by visits to potagers in France and by a series of old French training books, including *The Lorette System of Pruning* by Louis Lorette translated by WR Dykes 1925.

Facing page Chris on his Nottinghamshire nursery.



Branching out

The clean lines of a beautifully espaliered fruit tree is a thing of beauty in winter. Chris and Sarah Pike of Branch Nurseries are the masters of this art

WORDS LIA LEEDERTZ PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY

In a field in Nottinghamshire, Chris and Sarah Pike have done something surprisingly rare: turned old, local, British cultivars of apples and pears into U-cordons, palmette verriers and croisillons. “There isn’t a great tradition of fruit training for fancy forms in Britain,” says Chris. “People have always grown step-overs, fans and espaliers, but that is about the limit. This tradition comes from eastern France and Belgium and trained fruit is still most popular there.”

According to Chris, this divergence stems from the differing historical status of our edible gardens. “French potagers have always combined fruit, vegetables and flowers in an aesthetic manner whereas in the UK only the pleasure gardens full of flowers were close to the house. Productive areas were just productive,” he says.

It was in France that Chris caught the fruit training bug. “I visited Versailles, but then went across the road to the Potager du Roi. There are no signs, you could miss it, but it was once the king’s vegetable garden and is full of amazing trained fruit.” There he bought an old French book on the subject, *Encyclopédie Des Formes Fruitières* by Jacques Beccalletto. “The Versailles gardeners had made every shape imaginable; they were writing ‘Napoleon’ in pear trees.”

But while spectacular, it was not as useful to Chris as another old book: *The Lorette System of Pruning*. “We train using his system, which means always pruning in the second week of August.” At this time, shortening days send a signal to the plant not to put on further growth, and all energy goes into making fruit buds instead. Cut earlier than this and you risk encouraging new shoots in places you don’t want them; later and the buds have less time to swell. “We also cut back new shoots twice, as Lorette advocates, which adds another year on to the process but helps create a cluster of shoots in one small area. This allows you to select two shoots to train from almost exactly the same point of the stem.”

There is a reason only apple and pear trees are trained in these extravagant ways. “They fruit on old wood,” says Chris, “producing clusters of spurs that are a little like coral: they just build up over the years.” Plums and cherries also form spurs, but short-lived ones, while peaches and nectarines fruit best on young wood, so really need to be trained as fans with replaceable main stems. But despite the malleability of apples and pears, there are few growers in the UK creating anything fancy with old British varieties. It’s a gap in the market Chris decided he could fill while working for garden designer Arne Maynard.

On elaborately trained fruit the angles need to be sharp and the attention to detail precise, and not just for aesthetic reasons. “You lower the limbs to the horizontal to slow the sap and the plant’s growth. If one limb is slightly more angled towards the vertical than its opposite, or a curve is different, one side can grow more strongly and the plant will become lopsided over time.” For this reason it’s Sarah – a trained florist – who takes care of the actual training. “She’s just better at it,” says Chris. But it is Chris who has the fetish for old, often local cultivars. He chooses those he has come to love, such as apples ‘William Crump’, ‘Reverend Wilks’, ‘Cellini’, ‘Adam’s Pearmain’ and ‘Beauty of Bath’, and grows more than 70 as well as 30 different pears. “People do buy them,” he says, “but let’s not fool ourselves. This is my equivalent of the train set in the attic.” □

USEFUL INFORMATION

Visit branchnurseries.co.uk for details of Chris and Sarah’s fruit tree price list and availability.



Fruitful training

Follow Chris’s step-by-step guide and learn how to create your own trained fruit trees.

1 Chris bud-grafts his chosen variety on to a dwarfing rootstock in winter, and then the growth is tied into a cane as it grows.

2 In August it is cut back to the required height: 35cm from the ground for a step-over, 50cm for most other shapes. After 15cm of re-growth, Chris cuts the tree back to the exact same point again. This creates a cluster of buds on one point of the stem which will then all grow at the same level, and makes it easy to select two branches to train horizontally, or at 45 degrees for a Belgian fence (see page 99).

Once these buds turn into shoots, Chris or Sarah selects the best-placed ones and starts tying down. A central stem can be selected from the cluster to carry the shape on upwards. The double cutting back helps to keep this central point in balance with the rest of the limbs, and prevent it from drawing too much energy.

3 Growth is tied into the frame every 10cm during the crucial early stages of training, and is only ever left to grow free for 15cm before tying in.

4 Corners can be sharp or shallow, but it is vital that the shape of the two sides is perfectly matched.



Tree shapes

Double U-cordon

This takes a minimum of three years to form. "This is a good shape because you are breaking the vertical plane twice, each time halving the sap and slowing the whole tree down," says Chris. "There is less chance of one limb taking over, or of the whole thing going out of control."





U-cordon

Two or three years. "A brilliant, simple shape. Great planted either side of a path and grown over to make a free-standing arch."



Palmette verrier

Minimum three years. "Here again the central stem is broken so it's a lovely, easily managed shape once it is set."



Espalier

Minimum three years. "The central stem and top level will naturally be stronger and often take over. Many older trees are left as a T-shape."

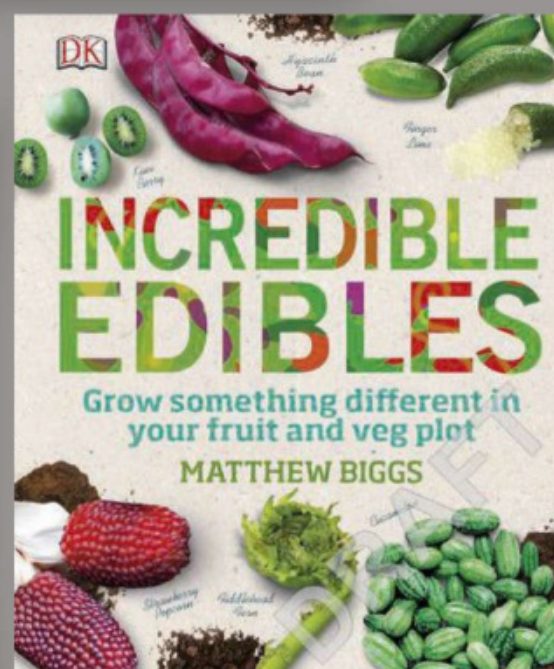
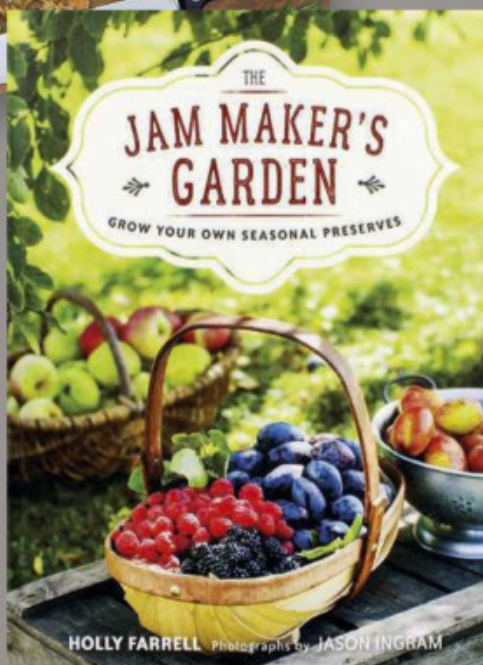
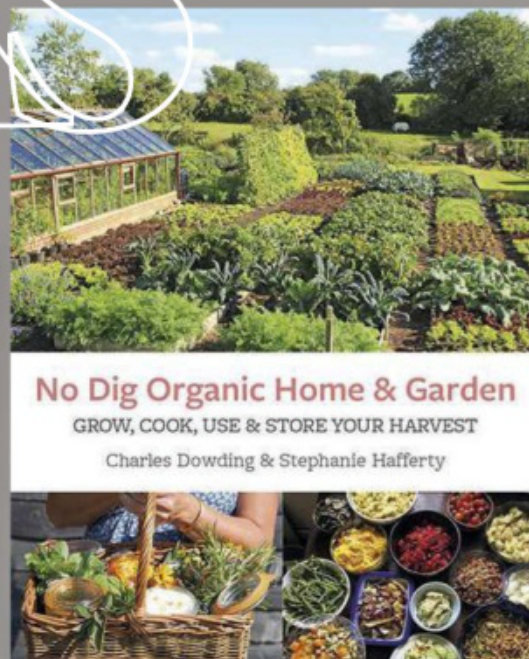
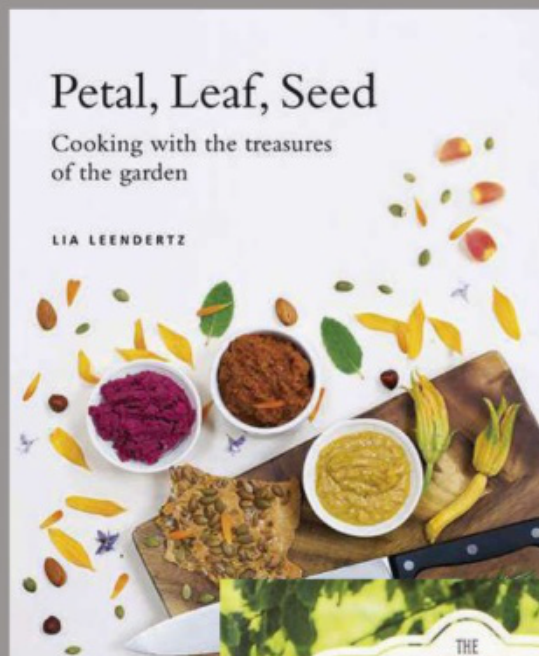


Belgian fence or croisillon

Minimum two years. "Plant a series of these in different cultivars to make a living fence. Where they cross they often form a natural graft."

Books

Essential books for kitchen gardeners



PETAL, LEAF, SEED: COOKING WITH THE TREASURES OF THE GARDEN

by Lia Leendertz, Kyle Books, £16.99, ISBN 978-0857833433
An enticing recipe book that is packed full of ideas on ways to use the unknown and underused treasures in your garden. There's useful practical information, including the best roses for flavour and which variety of courgette to grow for the flowers. Sometimes the home-grown ingredient is a small element in a recipe but adds a touch of excitement to something quite ordinary. This book will get you raiding the garden for pea flowers, radish seeds and handfuls of herbs all summer long.

THE JAM MAKER'S GARDEN

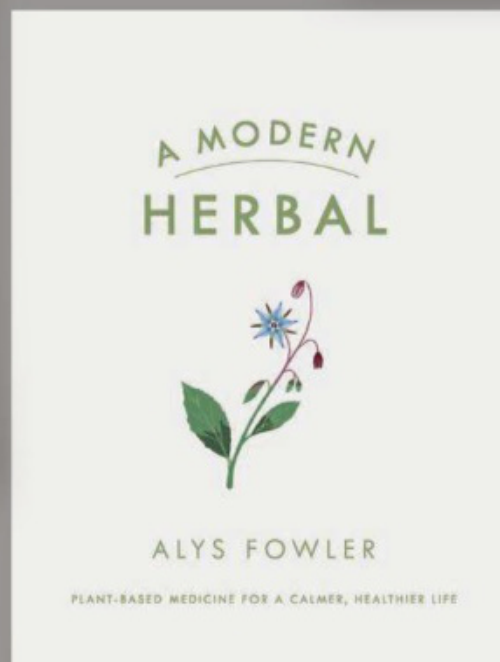
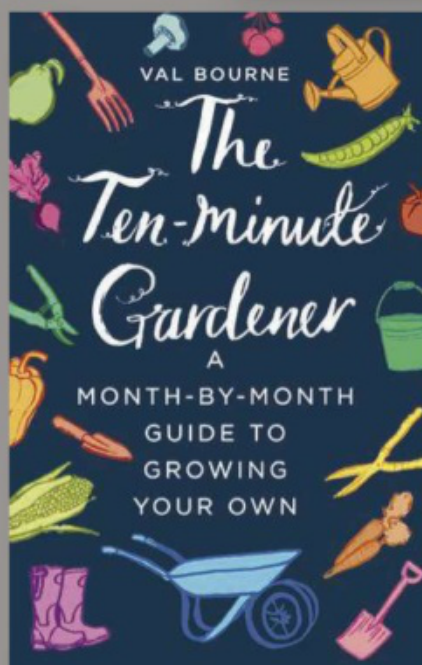
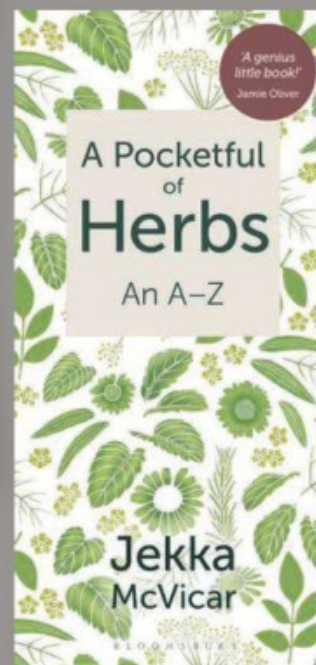
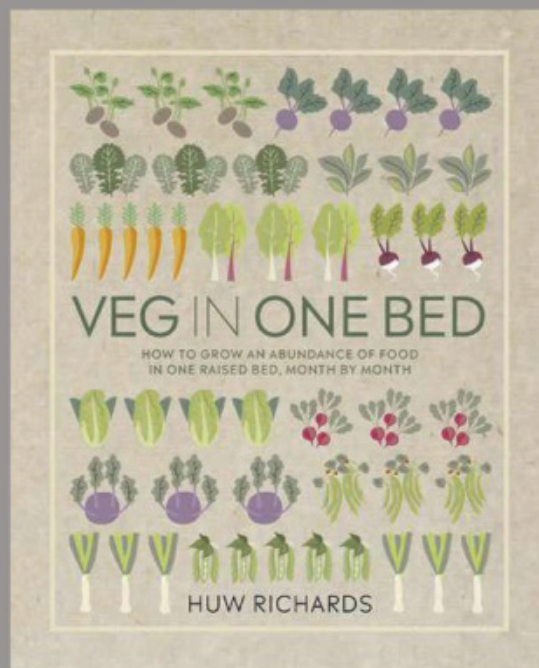
by Holly Farrell, Frances Lincoln, £17.99, ISBN 978-0711238145
Experienced gardener and baker, Holly Farrell, has been growing her own fruit and vegetables for many years. In this book, she shows us how to preserve delicious home-grown produce for months to come in jams, chutneys, cordials and sauces. It includes 50 tried-and-tested recipes and covers everything from planning a jam-maker's garden, through selecting the best varieties to grow, to sowing planting and harvesting, learning the skills of foraging and picking out the best produce. This is an indispensable guide for jam lovers – and will make you want to spread (excuse the pun) the love to others.

NO DIG ORGANIC HOME & GARDEN

by Charles Dowding and Stephanie Hafferty, Permanent Publications, £23, ISBN 978-1856233019
Charles Dowding has gained a devoted following with his promotion of the no-dig method because it is simple, logical and provides good results with minimal work. For the uninitiated, no-dig involves disturbing the soil as little as possible and improving it by laying on thick mulches of organic matter. But no-dig is just the starting point of this book, which covers every aspect of growing, cooking and preserving, combining all of the authors' knowledge, ideas and recipes.

INCREDIBLE EDIBLES

by Matthew Biggs, DK, £14.99, ISBN 978-0241302101
Incredible Edibles is an invitation to look beyond the familiar fruit, vegetables and herbs and try something deliciously different. The main book is organised by food type, such as Salad Vegetables, Herbs and Spices, with early pages devoted to tips and techniques and guidance about choosing what to grow. It's a book that will appeal to any gardener looking to extend the range of edible plants they grow through the year, and the thoroughness of information ensures that it is as suitable for the enthusiastic newcomer to edible gardening as it is for the experienced allotmenteer.



VEG IN ONE BED

by Huw Richards, DK, £14.99, ISBN 978-0241376522

This practical, month-by-month guide to growing vegetables will appeal to beginner kitchen gardeners or anyone with limited space. For beginner growers, knowing where to start can be daunting. This is not a book that requires green fingers – gardener Huw Richards knows his onions and provides a foolproof plan of how to produce 19 different vegetable crops from a 3m x 1.2m bed in one season. Monthly sections provide practical advice on filling your bed, illustrated through simple diagrams and photography of Richards in action.

THE TEN-MINUTE GARDENER: A MONTH-BY-MONTH GUIDE TO GROWING YOUR OWN

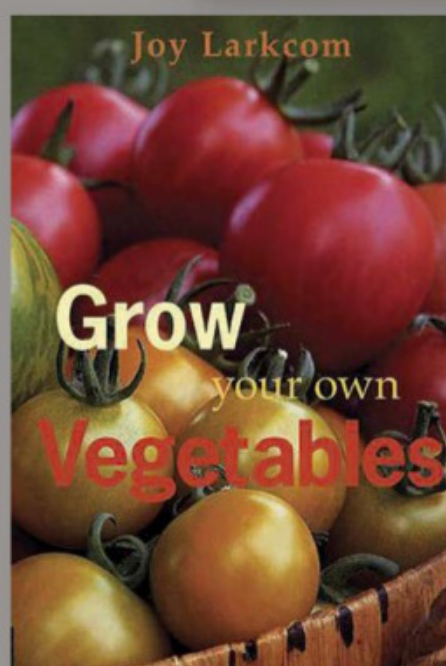
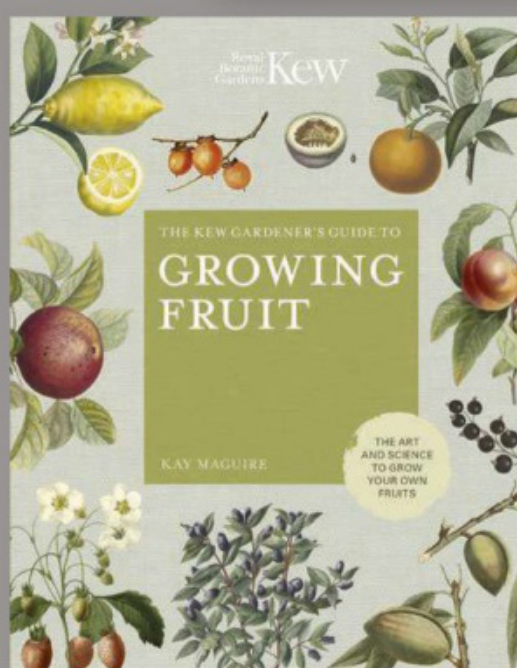
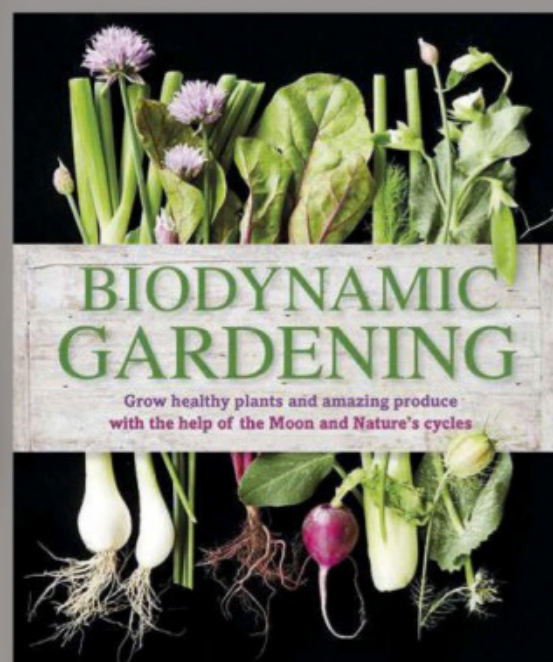
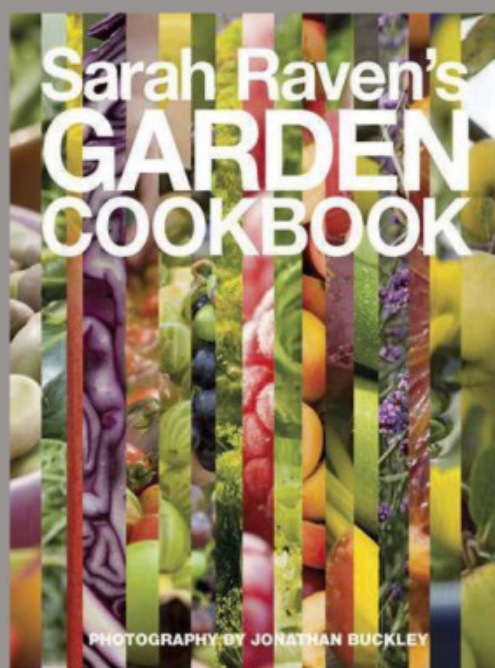
by Val Bourne, Bantam Press, £9.99, ISBN 978-1787631069
A month-by-month guide to growing your own fruit, vegetables and flowers from one of the UK's leading garden writers. All of the Ten-Minute series of books, of which this is the fourth – the other three covering fruit, vegetable, and flower growing – come from a series of weekly columns in *The Daily Telegraph*. It's a compendium of jobs and practical tips, most of them based on chemical-free, organic principles, and hard-won knowledge.

A POCKETFUL OF HERBS: AN A-Z

by Jekka McVicar, Bloomsbury Absolute, £12.99, ISBN 978-1472959478
The food on our plates wouldn't be the same without a dash of coriander, a sprinkle of parsley, or a garnish of torn basil, and where would we be without the joys of garlic and rosemary? Jekka McVicar is an expert on herbs; she grows more than 400 kinds at her herb farm Jekka's, and knows how best to nurture them, when you should pick them and which dishes they complement most. In this, handy, pocket-sized book she gives us a detailed run-through of the most indispensable herbs organised from A to Z. It's a go-to guide for chefs and gardeners alike.

A MODERN HERBAL

by Alys Fowler, Michael Joseph, £20, ISBN 978-0241368336
For millennia, people have used herbs to support their health – a connection many of us have lost. In this book Alys Fowler redresses the void and shares some simple ways in which she uses herbs to support wellbeing. In doing so, she empowers us with the knowledge of our ancestors, but unlike many ancient herbals, this book provides plenty of practical growing advice. Each entry comes with a well-researched history and a balance of known health properties and folklore. It is a fascinating invitation to get to know these plants as allies.



SARAH RAVEN'S GARDEN COOKBOOK

by Sarah Raven, Bloomsbury Publishing, £40, ISBN 978-0747588702

This iconic title from household name Sarah Raven includes over 450 recipes using home-grown vegetables, fruit and herbs from the UK. Laid out in six seasonal sections of two months each, it shows us what is best to eat and when. The simple yet delicious recipes range from warm broad bean salad to celeriac soufflé, sweet potato gratin, apple and quince cake, and even basil ice cream. Practical and engaging, and illustrated with sumptuous photographs of Raven's garden in East Sussex, this is a staple for food lovers, cooks and keen vegetable gardeners.

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, KEW – GROWING FRUIT

by Kay Maguire, White Lion Publishing, £12.99, ISBN 978-0711239371

Another title in the excellent Kew Gardener's Companion Guides series, which covers a whole host of fruit for the gardener to grow – everything from apples to pomegranates and nuts – with plenty of projects on topics such as dried fruit preservation to growing wild strawberries from seed and making damson gin. It combines botanical beauty and practical advice, bringing the wondrous world of fruit to life and encouraging confidence with produce growing. It's a real gem and is attractively laid out – the perfect present to get beginners hooked.

BIODYNAMIC GARDENING

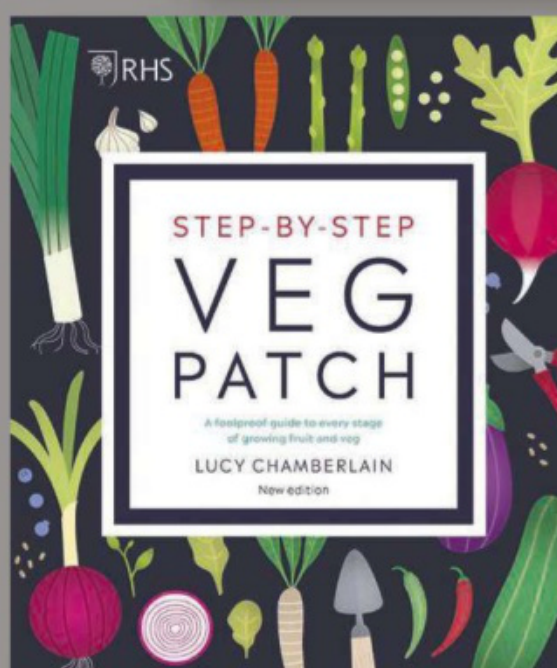
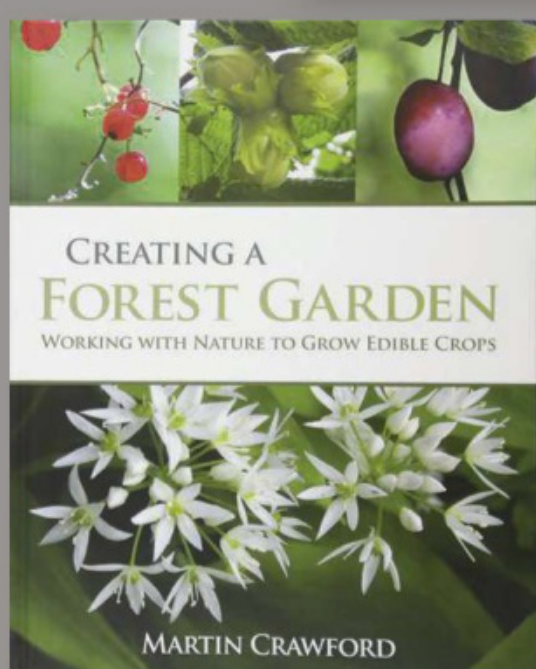
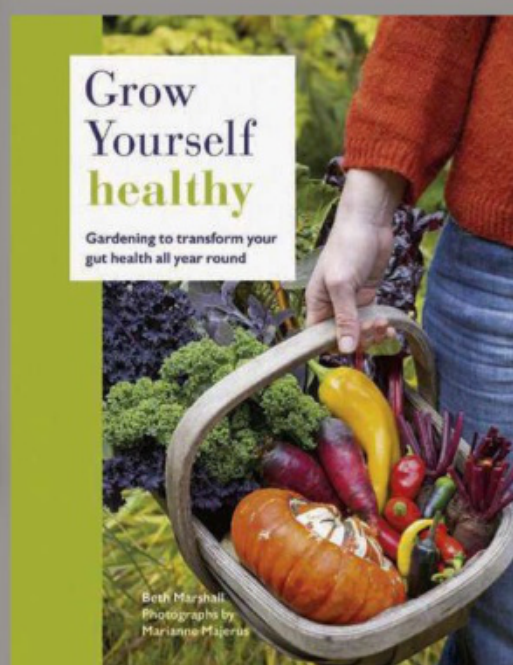
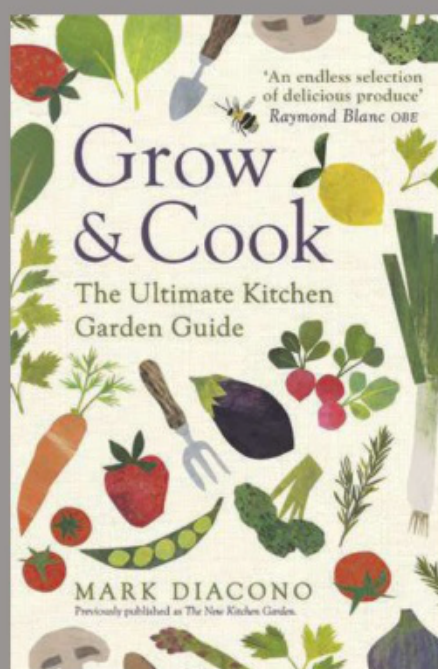
DK, £16.99, ISBN 978-1409369387

A book that presents a fresh, eco-focused approach to kitchen gardening. The biodynamic method of organic gardening is a sustainable way to nurture the soil and reconnect with seasonal cycles and natural rhythms. DK's accessible, illustrated guide gives readers step-by-step instructions on how to start a biodynamic garden, with tips on preparing and maintaining healthy soil, composting, cycles of rest, organic control of pests, and optimum harvesting times. It's the perfect choice for those wanting to work with nature at the same time as producing high-quality food in a natural, ethical kitchen garden.

GROW YOUR OWN VEGETABLES

by Joy Larkcom (revised edition 2002), Frances Lincoln, £9.99, ISBN 978-0711219632

The celebrated garden writer and world-leading expert in vegetable growing covers every base in this book, from how to prepare your soil, compost and manure, to detailed growing techniques, including pest and disease protection, and how to make the most of your garden space, however big or small. The addition of cultivation information for over 100 vegetables makes this an informative and detailed guide for gardeners of all levels and will ensure you are on the right path to creating and managing a productive vegetable garden.



GROW & COOK: THE ULTIMATE KITCHEN GARDEN GUIDE

by Mark Diacono, Headline Home, £10.99, ISBN 978-1472265463
Starting a kitchen garden may seem daunting to many, but *Grow & Cook* will nip that in the bud, thanks to the friendly and accessible style of writer and gardener Mark Diacono. Whether you have a window box or a substantial plot, this handbook will inspire you with plenty of growing guides for vegetables, fruit, nuts, herbs and spices, including more unusual produce such as *agretti* – a Mediterranean succulent related to samphire – and ‘Turkish Orange’ aubergine. You’ll be growing fresh produce and cooking up a storm in no time.

CREATING A FOREST GARDEN: WORKING WITH NATURE TO GROW EDIBLE CROPS

by Martin Crawford, Green Books, £30, ISBN 978-1900322621
If you’re hankering for a different approach to produce growing, look no further; *Creating a Forest Garden* introduces us to a novel way of growing edible crops, where nature takes the reins. Forest gardens are modelled on young, natural woodland, where a wide range of crops grow in vertical layers and little digging, weeding or pest resistance is required, making it an appealing gardening style for some. This book teaches us how to create such a garden without compromising soil health, food quality or biodiversity.

GROW YOURSELF HEALTHY: GARDENING TO TRANSFORM YOUR GUT HEALTH ALL YEAR ROUND

by Beth Marshall, Frances Lincoln, £18.99, ISBN 978-0711250710
Learn how to grow your produce in a way that will increase nutritional value and improve gut health. Horticulturist Beth Marshall shows us how to design and manage an edible garden, while explaining the science behind the produce and teaching us how to grow a diverse range of fruit, vegetables, herbs and edible flowers, all with health-boosting properties. There are a range of practical projects and a chapter on fermentation, with details of how to turn harvested produce into kimchi, pickles and fermented drinks.

RHS STEP-BY-STEP VEG PATCH: A FOOLPROOF GUIDE TO EVERY STAGE OF GROWING FRUIT AND VEG

by Lucy Chamberlain, DK, £16.99, ISBN 978-0241412411
For the nitty gritty on how to grow specific fruit and vegetables, this reference guide from the RHS is well worth a read. It contains clear instructions on how to grow more than 50 different crops, with practical advice on getting going, nurturing and maximising your harvest, alongside colourful photos. The book also discusses how to plan your space, whether that’s a vegetable patch, raised beds or containers, and covers a variety of planting themes to suit any type of garden and gardener.

Seasonal guide to growing vegetables

	Lettuce	Onion	Peas/Mangetout	Potato	Radish	Rocket	Spinach	Squash
JAN								
FEB								
MAR								
APR								
MAY								
JUN								
JUL								
AUG								
SEP								
OCT								
NOV								
DEC								

Artichoke, Globe

Bean, Broad

Bean, French

Bean, Runner

Beetroot

Broccoli

Brussels sprouts

Cabbage, Spring

Cabbage, Summer

Carrot

Celeriac

Courgette

Garlic

Kale

Leek



**Sow indoors
or under cover**



Sow outdoors



Plant out seedlings



Harvest



**Plant tubers,
sets or offsets**





Look out for more unusual cultivars, such as this candy-coloured beetroot *Beta vulgaris* 'Chioggia' and the golden-fleshed *Beta vulgaris* 'Golden', available from many specialist seed suppliers.

Our favourite edible seed suppliers

If you're looking for inspiration for herbs and vegetables to grow at home, take a look at our selection of the best seed suppliers

WORDS SORREL EVERTON

CHILTERN SEEDS

You'll find an interesting, tried-and-tested list of seed-sowing choices in the Chiltern Seeds vegetable catalogue. Favourites include the climbing French bean 'Cobra', which proves resilient to variable British summers, providing a good crop time and again. If you have a sheltered, sunny spot, you could try aubergine 'Kermit', a small, green, Thai type, or if space is limited the new 'Shooting Star' climbing, yellow courgette. **01491 824675, chilternseeds.co.uk**

FRANCHI SEEDS OF ITALY

Founder Paolo Arrigo has been awarded Slow Food UK's Person of the Year 2020 for his dedication to promoting seed biodiversity. His seed selection focus on endangered, heritage and ethical varieties with provenance – always with the key message of use it or lose it. For 2020, Paolo highlights chickpeas from Tuscany, and the endangered San Marzano tomato from the slopes of Vesuvius. **020 8427 5020, seedsofitaly.com**

JEKKA'S HERB FARM

Fresh herbs can enhance your cooking and boost your well-being. Queen of herbs, Jekka McVicar, stocks 140 varieties of herb, and the website includes a handy list of her top ten culinary herbs to grow from seed – a great resource if you're starting out with herb growing or want to expand your own list. Although the nursery is mail order only, Jekka holds plenty of open days and masterclasses and in 2020 is launching Herb Fest with garden and health guest speakers, herb-infused food and demonstrations. **01454 418878, jekkas.com**

KINGS SEED

Awarded Best Fruit and Vegetable Seed Range in 2019 at the Great British Growing

Awards, Kings Seed offers an excellent range of edibles, with a good selection of organic vegetable seed and plug plant options too. Good savings to be made on seed collections, such as the Allotment Collection containing 30 vegetable varieties for growing through the seasons. **01376 570000, kingsseeds.com**

MOLES SEEDS

An independent seed merchant with good selection sourced from some of the best seed producers, both conventional and organic. Although wholesale, Moles Seeds will supply anyone looking for larger quantities, so great for smallholding owners and gardening groups. **01206 213213, wholesale.molesseeds.co.uk**

PENNARD PLANTS

A 2019 RHS Master Grower, Pennard Plants sells one of the largest selections of edible plants, heritage and heirloom seeds, fruits and herbs, including over 70 heritage tomato cultivars. The nursery is run on organic principles and its range includes some interesting edibles such as Chinese celery with variegated, pink-tinged leaves. **01749 860039, pennardplants.com**

REAL SEEDS

All veg have been trialled and are only selected for sale if they grow well and taste good. Seed is open pollinated (non-hybrid), so can be collected and re-sown from one year to the next. New in 2020 is late 19th-century French tomato 'Peche Vilmorin Andrieux' – ideal for stuffing and with an attractive orange-pink, fuzzy skin. **01239 821107, realseeds.co.uk**

SEA SPRING SEEDS

Every vegetable has been tested before it is included in the catalogue, which is updated year on year to ensure that the

best edibles are included, and contains good cultivar choices and a wide range of veg (with a specialism in chillies). The website provides a selection of handy guides to growing. Look out for the EPG symbol, indicating 'easy peasy gardening' choices. **01308 897898, seaspringseeds.co.uk**

SEEDAHOLIC

Set up by self-confessed seed addicts, Seedaholic offers nearly 2,500 varieties along with plenty of information to help you make your seed choices. You'll receive a growing guide with your order too, with germination and growing on guidance, as well as ways to use. Organically registered. **+353 (0)94 954 8756, seedaholic.com**

SEED CO-OPERATIVE

The basis for this initiative is that the future of food needs to be rooted in a diversity of genetics and wildlife. All seed is from open-pollinated plants, much of it registered biodynamic and all adapted to organic growing systems. See the website for details of informative open days. **01775 840592, seedcooperative.org.uk**

TAMAR ORGANICS

A good range of vegetables for the organic gardener along with helpful growing advice. See the selection of organic, sprouting seeds for that quick-growing, flavour-filled vegetable hit. Online discount for orders over £150. **01579 371098, tamarorganics.co.uk**

THOMAS ETTY

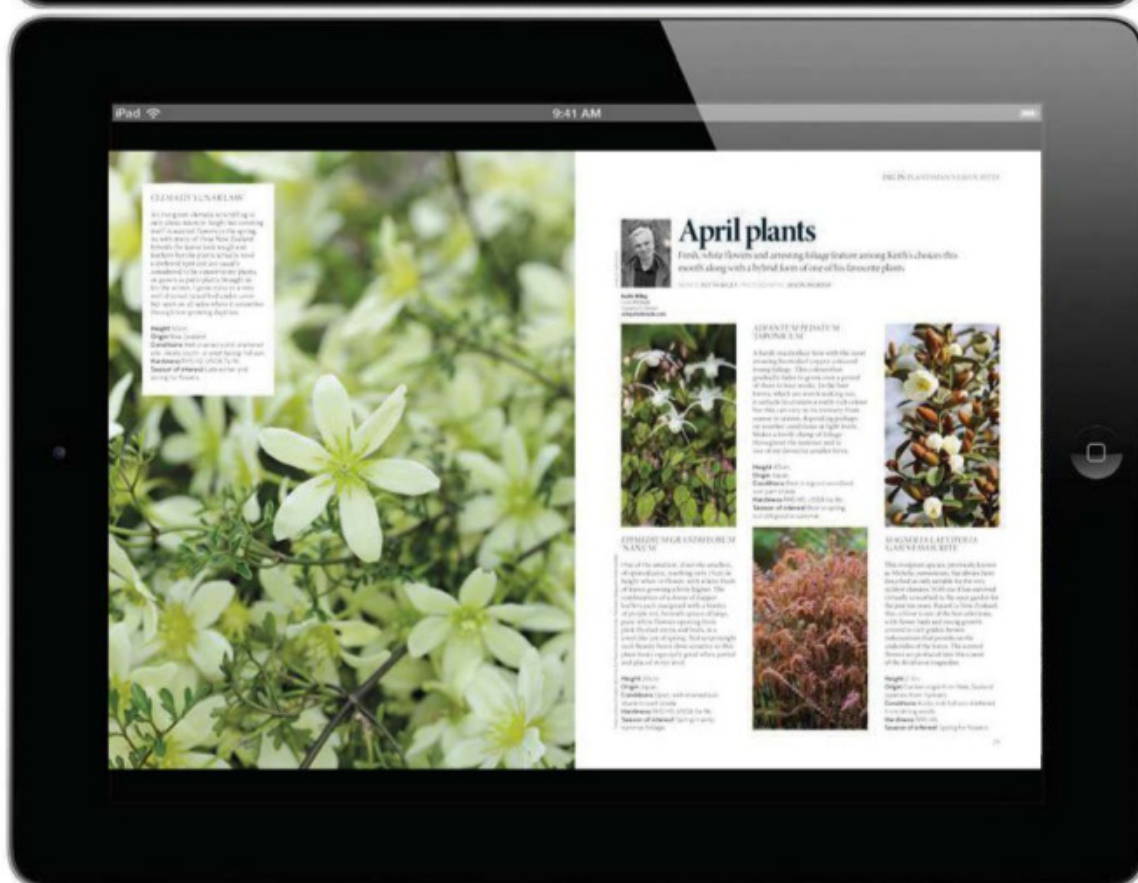
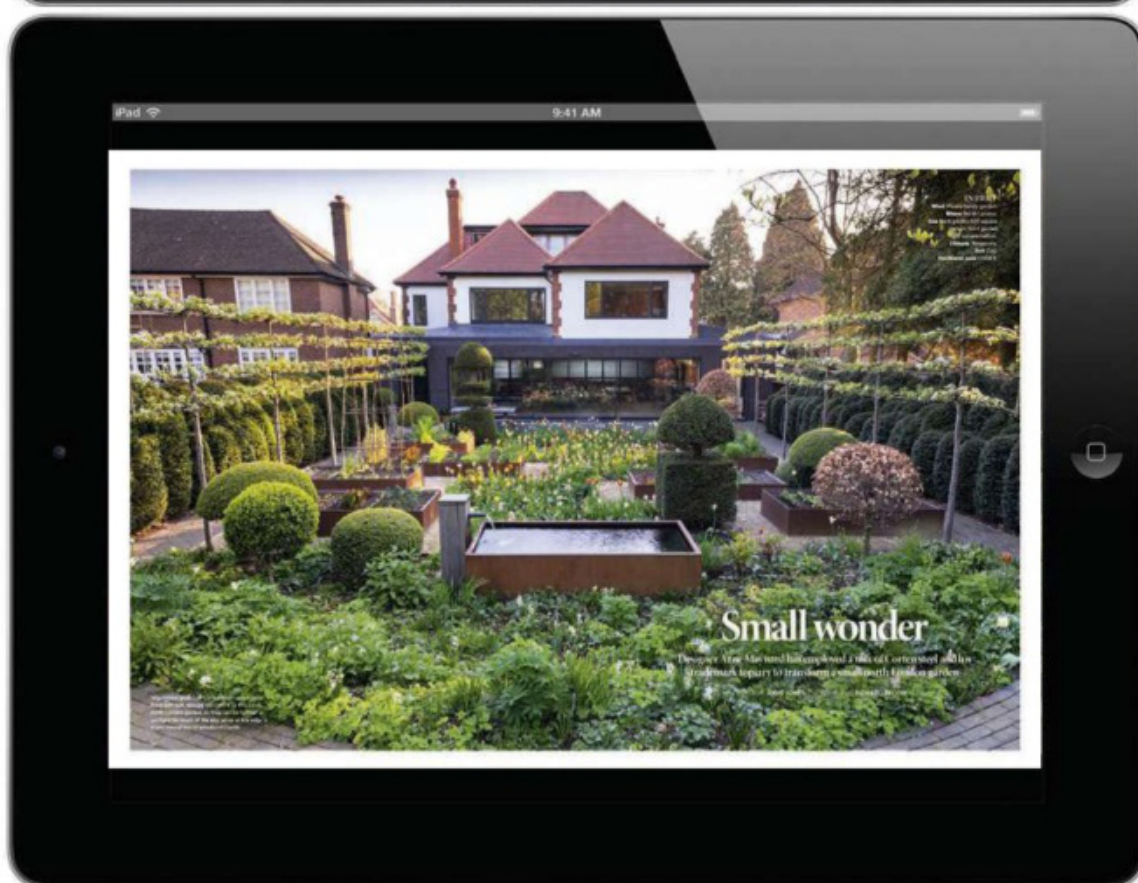
Among the range of heritage vegetable seeds are cultivars dating back centuries, meaning that there is always an interesting selection to peruse in the catalogue, such as 'Spanish Black' carrots dating from 1813 and newly offered perennial veg sea orach. **01460 298249, thomasetty.co.uk**

GARDENS

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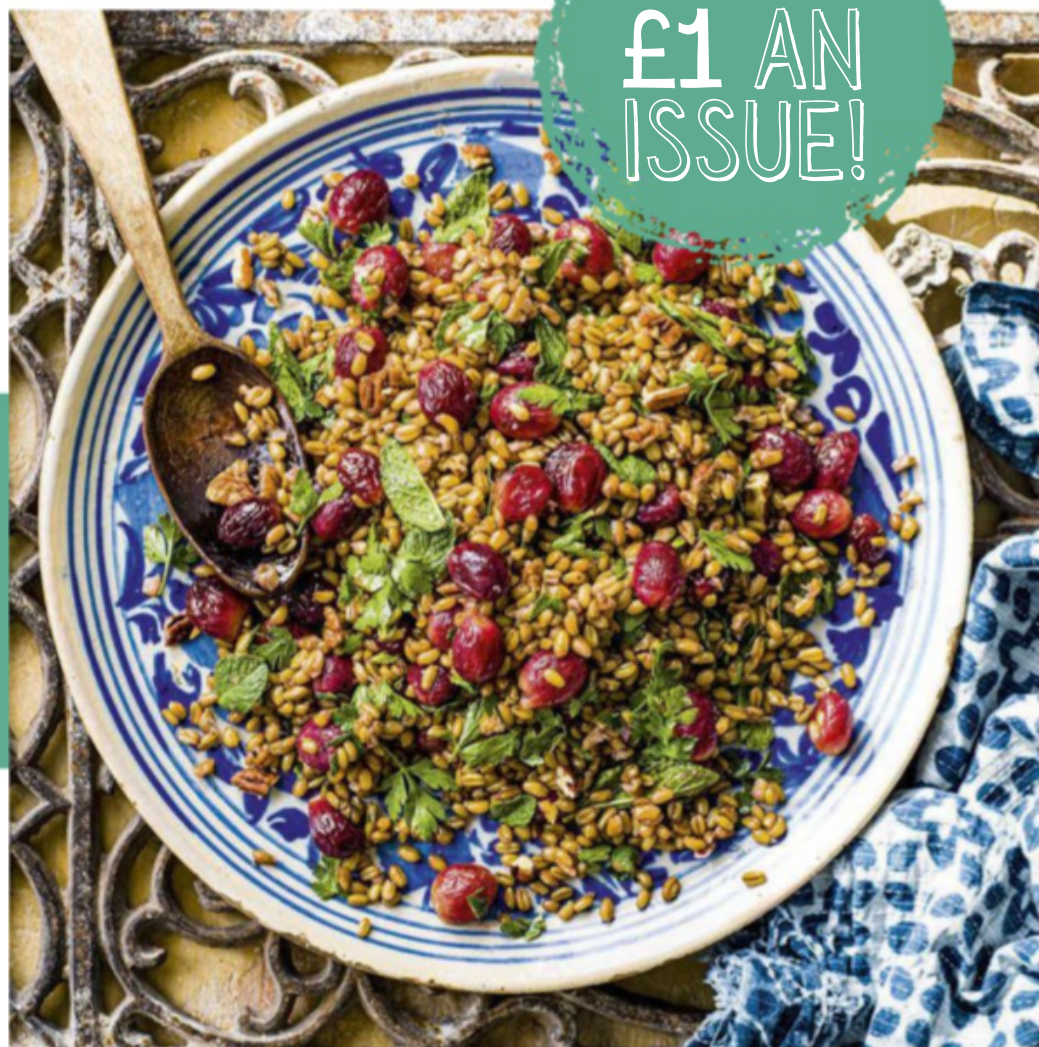
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The Newt, Somerset.



South Wood Farm, Devon.

23-26 SEPTEMBER 2020

WEST COUNTRY KITCHEN GARDENS

From plot to plate, our four-day reader holiday uncovers some of the South West's most exciting potagers and chefs' gardens



TOUR HOST

Sarah Wain

Along with husband Jim Buckland, Sarah is the inspirational force behind the restoration of the Kitchen Garden at West Dean, Sussex, where they perfected the growing of both fruit and vegetable crops.

With the call to grow your own becoming ever louder, our tour offers help, inspiration and expertise on how to grow the finest kitchen garden produce throughout the year. We visit a contrasting selection of the very best examples of kitchen gardens in the South West: we are taken from the plot to the plate at both **The Pig at Combe** and at Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's organic smallholding at **River Cottage**; at **South Wood Farm** we see Arne Maynard's design for a productive potager and we glimpse true estate gardening at **Edmondsham House**, while also visiting the unusual 18th-century 'serpentine' wall of the kitchen garden at **Deans Court**. As well as organic gardening, we also consider the no-dig approach, as espoused by **Charles Dowding** at his own impressively productive garden, and come bang up to date with a visit to recently opened boutique hotel **The Newt** with its decorative kitchen garden. The tour is based at the Georgian **Summer Lodge Hotel** in the Dorset village of Evershot and surrounded by rolling hills, with a small kitchen garden of its own and where guests will be warmly welcomed.

BOOKING DETAILS

Price per person, based on two people sharing is £2,595 (a single supplement of £300 is levied by the hotel).

The price includes: three nights' bed & breakfast accommodation at Summer Lodge; three dinners with wine; plus three lunches, and transport from Bristol Parkway Railway Station or Summer Lodge. The price does not include extras or travel insurance. Please note that hotels used by Boxwood Tours are invariably hotels of character featuring a variety of rooms and styles.

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Edible gardens to visit

Get a real taste of the season in these fabulous gardens



1 HILL CLOSE GARDENS TRUST

Hill Close Gardens is a unique set of 16 Victorian detached gardens. Each has its own character and charm, reflecting the personality of its past owners. HCG offers guided tours for groups, year-round events and workshops, off-site talks, venue hire, a weekend tea room during summer, plant sales and more.

Bread & Meat Close, Warwick CV34 6HF | hillclosegardens.com



2 MYDDELTON HOUSE GARDENS

Organic, heritage fruit and vegetables grace the beds of Myddelton's Kitchen Garden each season for visitors to sample varieties from the past. This restored area of the gardens boasts Victorian glasshouses with trained fruits, national plant collections and a new orchard and meadow being introduced in 2020.

Bulls Cross, Enfield EN2 9HG | visitlee valley.org.uk/myddelton



4 CHARTWELL

Every autumn the Walled Garden is full of ripe vegetables ready to be picked. Once grown to feed Winston Churchill and his family, you can now try some in dishes from the café. Apples from the Chartwell Orchard, just outside the walls, are picked to make our very own Chartwell Apple Juice available from the shop.

Westerham, Kent, TN16 1PS | nationaltrust.org.uk/chartwell



3 HAM HOUSE AND GARDEN

Ham House's historic walled Kitchen Garden showcases growing food and cut flowers from the 17th century to the present day. Using sustainable, organic practises, the Kitchen Garden hosts the Orangery Café: sit in the growing space and enjoy its produce.

Richmond, Surrey TW10 7RS | 020 8940 1950 | hamhouse@nationaltrust.org.uk



5 BALLYMALOE COOKERY SCHOOL ORGANIC FARM AND GARDENS

Walk through the little wooden gate at the entrance to Ballymaloe Cookery School and step into a veritable Eden. Open Monday to Saturday 11am–5.30pm, closed Sunday.

Shanagarry, Co. Cork, Ireland P25 R274 | +353 21 4646785 2 | cookingisfun.ie

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GARDENS

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MILL

Keyneston Mill, Home of Parterre Fragrances



Nestled in the Tarrant Valley, bordered by the River Stour, Keyneston Mill is the creative and experimental home of Parterre Fragrances.

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trial beds where unusual varieties are grown for distillation in small batches.

Beyond the formal gardens are the Perfume Crop Fields, the River Walk and The Lost Orchard.

Visitors can enjoy delicious meals with a fragrant twist at The Scented Botanist Bistro-Café. Many of the ingredients are produced on the estate or locally sourced.

You can also browse the perfume & gift shop, and discover more about fragrance



by joining a tour, perfume blending workshop or one of a wide range of scent-related experiences. Private parties and groups welcome.



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• **Open all year**

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• **To plan an event or book a table, contact us using one of the below:**

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• events@keynestonmill.com

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